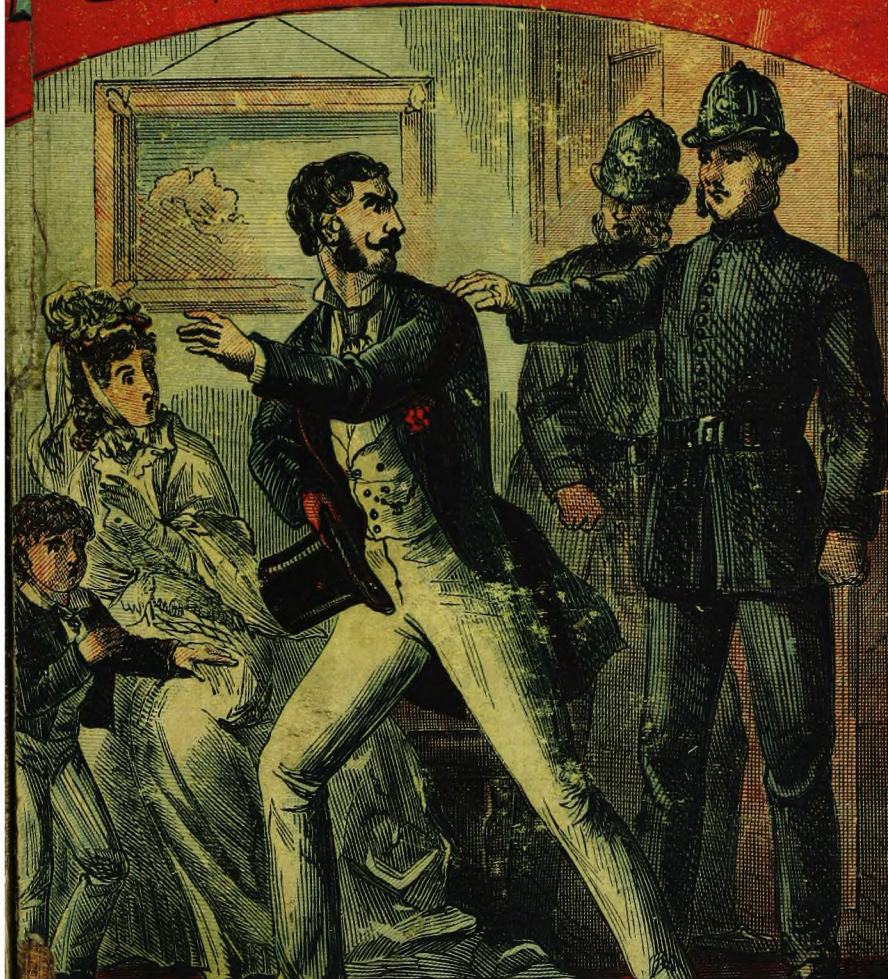




# RECOLLECTIONS OF A DETECTIVE POLICE OFFICER





RECOLLECTIONS  
OF A  
DETECTIVE POLICE-OFFICER  
BY  
“WATERS.”

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“Police or Peace Officers are the life-guards of the sleeping realm, without whom chambers would not be safe, nor the strong law of more potency than a bulrush.”  
— DENMAN.

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LONDON:  
WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER,  
WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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## PREFACE.

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It appears to me, that the very different position in the social scale of this country occupied by the War and Peace Soldier—the Bayonet and the Bâton—must be mainly attributable to a traditionary prejudice derived from the ancient and heroic times when might made right, and the notion that a cattle-stealer upon a considerable scale, though a mail-clad baron or belted knight, was also a robber and a felon, would, if by some strange chance expressed, have been scouted as a preposterous absurdity. No one can deny that the safety and peace of British hearths and homes are quite as much, if not more, due to peace-officers than to soldiers, as their honoured brethren of the bayonet are familiarly called ; whilst the “courage” which, as a body, the Police evince in the discharge of

their onerous and perilous duties, is, I am bold to say, as unquailing and determined, though not displayed under such brilliant lights, as that which stormed the now historic heights of Alma, and chased back the Muscovite, baffled and dismayed, from the bloody ravines of Inkermann. I, of course, speak only of the police-force of Great Britain, who are entrusted with strictly-defined legitimate duties; and for the proper performance of which duties they are amenable to the ordinary tribunals of Justice. I know little, and cannot, from experience, speak of the services required of the police of other countries, nor consequently of the consideration to which those services entitle them from the people whose "peace" they are presumed to guard.

I, therefore, offer no apology for placing these genuine sketches of police-experience before the reader. They describe incidents more or less interesting and instructive of the domestic warfare constantly waging between the agents and breakers of the law, in which the stratagems and disguises resorted to by detective officers are, in my opinion, and in the opinion of thousands of others, as legitimate, aye, and *quite* as honourable *ruses de guerre*—notwithstanding the lofty rebuke once administered by a dignified judge to the late Inspector Field, for presuming to speak of his "honour"—as a military ambuscade, or the

cautious creeping of an undistinguishable rifleman within easy shooting-distance of an unsuspecting enemy.

Most of these sketches are published by permission from *Chambers' Journal*. It is therefore somewhat superfluous to assure the reader that nothing will be found in these narratives of a varied experience to in the slightest degree encourage a "Jack Sheppard" vocation, or one line that can raise a blush on the most sensitive cheek. From first to last, my "Recollections of a Detective Police-Officer" may be read with advantage by old and young, as papers descriptive of actual occurrences, in which crime always brought regret and remorse to the offender.

C. W.





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# RECOLLECTIONS

OF A

## DETECTIVE POLICE OFFICER



### CHAPTER I.

#### ONE NIGHT IN A GAMING-HOUSE.

A LITTLE more than a year after the period when adverse circumstances—chiefly the result of my own reckless follies—compelled me to enter the ranks of the Metropolitan Police, as the sole means left me of procuring food and raiment, the attention of one of the principal chiefs of the force was attracted towards me by the ingenuity and boldness which I was supposed to have manifested in hitting upon and unravelling a clue which ultimately led to the detection and punishment of the perpetrators of an artistically-contrived fraud upon an eminent tradesman of the west end of London. The chief sent for me; and after a somewhat lengthened conversation, not only expressed approbation of my conduct in the particular matter under discussion, but hinted that he might shortly need my services in other affairs requiring intelligence and resolution.

“I think I have met you before,” he remarked, with a meaning smile, on dismissing me, “when you occupied a different position from your present one? Do not alarm yourself; I have no wish to pry unnecessarily into other men’s secrets. Waters is a name common enough in *all* ranks of society, and I may, you know”—here the cold smile deepened in ironical expression—“be mistaken. At all events, the testimony of the

gentleman whose recommendation obtained your admission into the force—I have looked into the matter since I heard of your behaviour in the late business—is a sufficient guarantee that nothing more serious than imprudence and folly can be laid to your charge. I have neither right nor inclination to inquire further. To-morrow, in all probability, I shall send for you.”

I came to the conclusion, as I walked homewards, that the chief's intimation of having previously met me in another sphere of life was a random and unfounded one, as I had seldom visited London in my prosperous days, and still more rarely mingled in its society. My wife, however, to whom I of course related the substance of the conversation, reminded me that he had once been at Doncaster during the races, and suggested that he might possibly have seen and noticed me there. This was a sufficiently probable explanation of the hint; but whether the correct one or not, I cannot decide, as he never afterwards alluded to the subject, and I had not the slightest wish to renew it.

Three days elapsed before I received the expected summons. On waiting on him, I was agreeably startled to find that I was to be at once employed on a mission which the most sagacious and experienced of detective-officers would have felt honoured to undertake.

“Here is a written description of the persons of this gang of blacklegs, swindlers, and forgers,” concluded the commissioner, summing up his instructions. “It will be your object to discover their private haunts, and secure legal evidence of their nefarious practices. We have been hitherto baffled, principally, I think, through the too hasty zeal of the officers employed. You must especially avoid that error. They are practised scoundrels; and it will require considerable patience, as well as acumen, to unkennel and bring them to justice. One of their more recent victims is young Mr. Merton, son, by a former marriage, of the Dowager Lady Everton.\* Her ladyship has applied to us for assistance in extricating him from the toils in which he is meshed. You will call on her at five o'clock this afternoon—in plain clothes of course—and obtain whatever

\* The names mentioned in these narratives are, for obvious reasons, fictitious.

information on the subject she may be able to afford. Remember to communicate *directly* with me; and any assistance you may require shall be promptly rendered."

With these, and a few other minor directions, needless to recapitulate, I was dismissed to a task which, difficult and possibly perilous as it might prove, I hailed as a delightful relief from the wearying monotony and dull routine of ordinary duty.

I hastened home; and after dressing with great care—the best part of my wardrobe had been fortunately saved by Emily from the wreck of my fortunes—I proceeded to Lady Everton's mansion. I was immediately marshalled to the drawing-room, where I found her ladyship and her daughter—a beautiful, fairy-looking girl—awaiting my arrival. Lady Everton appeared greatly surprised at my appearance, differing, as I dare say it altogether did, from her abstract idea of a policeman, however attired or disguised; and it was not till she had perused the note of which I was the bearer, that her haughty and incredulous stare became mitigated to a glance of lofty, condescending civility.

"Be seated, Mr. Waters," said her ladyship, waving me to a chair. "This note informs me that you have been selected for the duty of endeavouring to extricate my son from the perilous entanglements in which he has unhappily involved himself."

I was about to reply—for I was silly enough to feel somewhat nettled at the noble lady's haughtiness of manner—that I was engaged in the public service of extirpating a gang of swindlers with whom her son had involved himself, and was there to procure from her ladyship any information she might be possessed of likely to forward so desirable a result: but fortunately the remembrance of my actual position, spite of my gentleman's attire, flashed vividly upon my mind; and instead of permitting my glib tongue to wag irreverently in the presence of a right honourable, I bowed with deferential acquiescence.

Her ladyship proceeded, and I in substance obtained the following information—

Mr. Charles Merton, during the few months which had elapsed since the attainment of his majority, had very literally "fallen among thieves." A passion for gambling seemed to have taken entire possession of his being; and almost every

day, as well as night, of his haggard and feverish life was passed at play. A run of ill-luck, according to his own belief—but in very truth a run of downright robbery—had set in against him, and he had not only dissipated all the ready money which he had inherited, and the large sums which the foolish indulgence of his lady-mother had supplied him with, but had involved himself in bonds, bills, and other obligations to a frightful amount. The principal agent in effecting this ruin was one Sandford—a man of fashionable and dashing exterior, and the presiding spirit of the knot of desperadoes whom I was commissioned to hunt out. Strange to say, Mr. Merton had the blindest reliance upon this man's honour; and even now—tricked, despoiled as he had been by him and his gang—relied upon his counsel and assistance for escape from the desperate position in which he was involved. The Everton estates had passed, in default of male issue, to a distant relative of the late lord, so that ruin, absolute and irremediable, stared both the wretched dupe and his relatives in the face. Lady Everton's jointure was not a very large one, and her son had been permitted to squander sums which should have been devoted to the discharge of claims which were now pressed harshly against her.

I listened with the deepest interest to Lady Everton's narrative. Repeatedly during the course of it, as she incidentally alluded to the manners and appearance of Sandford, who had been introduced by Mr. Merton to his mother and sister, a suspicion, which the police papers had first awakened, that the gentleman in question was an old acquaintance of my own, and one, moreover, whose favours I was extremely desirous to return in kind, flashed with increased conviction across my mind. This surmise I of course kept to myself; and after emphatically cautioning the ladies to keep our proceedings a profound secret from Mr. Merton, I took my leave, amply provided with the resources requisite for carrying into effect the scheme which I had resolved upon. I also arranged that, instead of waiting personally on her ladyship, which might excite observation and suspicion, I should report progress by letter through the post.

"If it *should* be he!" thought I, as I emerged into the street. The bare suspicion had sent the blood through my veins with furious violence. "If this Sandford be, as I

suspect, that villain Cardon, success will indeed be triumph—victory! Lady Everton need not in that case seek to animate my zeal by promises of money recompense. A blighted existence, a young and gentle wife by his means cast down from opulence to sordid penury, would stimulate the dullest craven that ever crawled the earth to energy and action. Pray Heaven my suspicion prove correct; and then, oh, mine enemy, look well to yourself, for the avenger is at your heels!”

Sandford, I had been instructed, was usually present at the Italian opera during the ballet: the box he generally occupied was designated in the memoranda of the police: and as I saw by the bills that a very successful piece was to be performed that evening, I determined on being present.

I entered the house a few minutes past ten o'clock, just after the commencement of the ballet, and looked eagerly round. The box in which I was instructed to seek my man was empty. The momentary disappointment was soon repaid. Five minutes had not elapsed when Cardon, looking more insolently-triumphant than ever, entered arm-in-arm with a pale, aristocratic-looking young man, whom I had no difficulty, from his striking resemblance to a portrait in Lady Everton's drawing-room, in deciding to be Mr. Merton. My course of action was at once determined on. Pausing only to master the emotion which the sight of the glittering reptile in whose poisonous folds I had been involved and crushed inspired, I passed to the opposite side of the house, and boldly entered the box. Cardon's back was towards me, and I tapped him lightly on the shoulder. He turned quickly round; and if a basilisk had confronted him, he could scarcely have exhibited greater terror and surprise. My aspect, nevertheless, was studiously bland and conciliating, and my outstretched hand seemed to invite a renewal of our old friendship.

“Waters!” he at last stammered, feebly accepting my proffered grasp—“who would have thought of meeting you here?”

“Not you, certainly, since you stare at an old friend as if he were some frightful goblin about to swallow you. Really”——

“Hush! Let us speak together in the lobby. An old friend,” he added, in answer to Mr. Merton's surprised stare. “We will return in an instant.”



"Why, what is all this, Waters?" said Cardon, recovering his wonted *sang froid* the instant we were alone. "I understood you had retired from amongst us; were, in fact—what shall I say?"

"Ruined—done up! Nobody should know that better than you."

"My good fellow, you do not imagine"—

"I imagine nothing, my dear Cardon. I was very thoroughly done—done *brown*, as it is written in the vulgar tongue. But fortunately my kind old uncle"—

"Passgrove is dead!" interrupted my old acquaintance, eagerly jumping to a conclusion, "and you are his heir! I congratulate you, my dear fellow. This is indeed a charming 'reverse of circumstances.'"

"Yes; but mind, I have given up the old game. No more dice-devilry for me. I have promised Emily never even to touch a card again."

The cold, hard eye of the incarnate fiend—he was little else—gleamed mockingly as these "good intentions" of a practised gamester fell upon his ear; but he only replied, "Very good; quite right, my dear boy. But come, let me introduce you to Mr. Merton, a highly-connected personage, I assure you. By-the-by. Waters," he added, in a caressing, confidential tone, "my name, for family and other reasons, which I will hereafter explain to you, is for the present Sandford."

"Sandford!"

"Yes: do not forget. But *allons*, or the ballet will be over."

I was introduced in due form to Mr. Merton as an old and esteemed friend, whom he—Sandford—had not seen for many months. At the conclusion of the ballet, Sandford proposed that we should adjourn to the European Coffee-house, nearly opposite. This was agreed to, and out we sallied. At the top of the staircase we jostled against the commissioner, who, like us, was leaving the house. He bowed slightly to Mr. Merton's apology, and his eye wandered briefly and coldly over our persons; but not the faintest sign of interest or recognition escaped him. I thought it possible he did not know me in my changed apparel; but looking back after descending a few steps I was quickly undeceived. A sharp, swift glance, expressive both of

encouragement and surprise, shot out from under his penthouse brows, and as swiftly vanished. He did not know how little I needed spurring to the goal we had both in view !

We discussed two or three bottles of wine with much gaiety and relish. Sandford especially was in exuberant spirits ; brimming over with brilliant anecdote and sparkling badinage. He saw in me a fresh, rich prey, and his eager spirit revelled by anticipation in the victory which he nothing doubted to obtain over my "excellent intentions and wife-pledged virtue." About half-past twelve o'clock he proposed to adjourn. This was eagerly assented to by Mr. Merton, who had for some time exhibited unmistakable symptoms of impatience and unrest.

"You will accompany us, Waters ?" said Sandford, as we rose to depart. "There is, I suppose, no vow registered in the matrimonial archives against *looking on* at a game played by others ?"

"Oh, no ! But don't ask me to play."

"Certainly not ;" and a devilish sneer curled his lip. "Your virtue shall suffer no temptation, be assured."

We soon arrived before the door of a quiet, respectable-looking house in one of the streets leading from the Strand : a low, peculiar knock, given by Sandford, was promptly answered ; then a password, which I did not catch, was whispered by him through the key-hole, and we passed in.

We proceeded up-stairs to the first floor, the shutters of which were carefully closed, so that no intimation of what was going on could possibly reach the street. The apartment was brilliantly lighted : a roulette table and dice and cards were in full activity ; wine and liquors of all varieties were profusely paraded. There were about half-a-dozen persons present, I soon discovered, besides the gang, and that comprised eleven or twelve well-dressed desperadoes, whose sinister aspects induced a momentary qualm lest one or more of the pleasant party might suspect or recognise my vocation. This, however, I reflected was scarcely possible. My beat during the short period I had been in the force was far distant from the usual haunts of such gentry, and I was otherwise unknown in London. Still, questioning glances were eagerly directed towards my introducer ; and one big, burly fellow, a foreigner—the rascals were

the scum of various countries—was very unpleasantly inquisitorial. “*J’en réponds !*” I heard Sandford say in answer to his iterated queries ; and he added something in a whisper which brought a sardonic smile to the fellow’s lips, and induced a total change in his demeanour towards myself. This was reassuring ; for though provided with pistols, I should, I felt, have little chance with such utterly reckless ruffians as those by whom I was surrounded. Play was proposed ; and though at first stoutly refusing, I feigned to be gradually overcome by irresistible temptation, and sat down to blind hazard with my foreign friend for moderate stakes. I was graciously allowed to win ; and in the end found myself richer in devil’s money by about ten pounds. Mr. Merton was soon absorbed in the chances of the dice, and lost large sums, for which, when the money he had brought with him was exhausted, he gave written acknowledgments. The cheating practised upon him was really audacious ; and any one but a tyro must have repeatedly detected it. He, however, appeared not to entertain the slightest suspicion of the “fair play” of his opponents, guiding himself entirely by the advice of his friend and counsellor, Sandford, who did not himself play. The amiable assemblage broke up about six in the morning, each person retiring singly by the back way, receiving, as he departed, a new password for the next evening.

A few hours afterwards I waited on the commissioner to report the state of affairs. He was delighted with the fortunate *début* I had made, but still strictly enjoined patience and caution. It would have been easy, as I was in possession of the password, to have surprised the confederacy in the act of gaming that very evening ; but this would only have accomplished a part of the object aimed at. Several of the fraternity—Sandford amongst the number—were suspected of uttering forged foreign bank-notes, and it was essential to watch narrowly for legal evidence to insure their conviction. It was also desirable to restore, if possible, the property and securities of which Mr. Merton had been pillaged.

Nothing of especial importance occurred for seven or eight days. Gaming went on as usual every evening, and Mr. Merton became, of course, more and more involved ; even his

sister's jewels—which he had surreptitiously obtained, to such a depth of degradation will this vice plunge men otherwise honourable—had been staked and lost; and he was, by the advice of Sandford, about to conclude a heavy mortgage on his estate, in order not only to clear off his enormous “debts of honour,” but to acquire fresh means of “winning back”—that *ignis fatuus* of all gamblers—his tremendous losses! A new preliminary “dodge” was, I observed, now brought into action. Mr. Merton esteemed himself a knowing hand at *écarté*: it was introduced; and he was permitted to win every game he played, much to the apparent annoyance and discomfiture of the losers. As this was precisely the snare into which I had myself fallen, I of course the more readily detected it, and felt quite satisfied that a *grand coup* was meditated. In the meantime I had not been idle. Sandford was *confidentially* informed that I was only waiting in London to receive between four and five thousand pounds—part of Uncle Passgrove's legacy—and then intended to immediately hasten back to canny Yorkshire. To have seen the villain's eyes as I incidentally, as it were, announced my errand and intention! They fairly flashed with infernal glee! Ah, Sandford, Sandford! you were, with all your cunning, but a sand-blind idiot to believe the man you had wronged and ruined could so easily forget the debt he owed you!

The crisis came swiftly on. Mr. Merton's mortgage money was to be paid on the morrow; and on that day, too, I announced the fabulous thousands receivable by me were to be handed over. Mr. Merton, elated by his repeated triumphs at *écarté*, and prompted by his friend Sandford, resolved, instead of cancelling the bonds and obligations held by the conspirators, to redeem his losses by staking on that game his ready money against those liabilities. This was at first demurred to with much apparent earnestness by the winners; but Mr. Merton, warmly seconded by Sandford, insisting upon the concession, as he deemed it, it was finally agreed that *écarté* should be the game by which he might hope to regain the fortune and the peace of mind he had so rashly squandered; the last time, should he be successful—and was he not sure of success?—he assured Sandford, that he would ever handle cards or dice. He should have heard the mocking merriment with which the gang heard

Sandford repeat this resolution to amend his ways—*when* he had recovered back his wealth !

The day so eagerly longed for by Merton and the confederates—by the spoilers and their prey—arrived ; and I awaited with feverish anxiety the coming on of night. Only the chief conspirators—eight in number—were to be present ; and no stranger except myself—a privilege I owed to the moonshine legacy I had just received, was to be admitted to this crowning triumph of successful fraud. One only hint I had ventured to give Mr. Merton, and that under a promise, “on his honour as a gentleman,” of inviolable secrecy. It was this : “Be sure, before commencing play to-morrow night, that the bonds and obligations you have signed, the jewels you have lost, with a sum in notes or gold to make up an equal amount to that which you mean to risk, is actually deposited on the table.” He promised to insist on this condition. It involved much more than he dreamt of.

My arrangements were at length thoroughly complete ; and a few minutes past twelve o'clock the whispered password admitted me into the house. An angry altercation was going on. Mr. Merton was insisting, as I had advised, upon the exhibition of a sum equal to that which he had brought with him—for, confident of winning, he was determined to recover his losses to the last farthing ; and although his bonds, bills, obligations, his sister's jewels, and a large amount in gold and genuine notes, were produced, there was still a heavy sum deficient. “Ah, by-the-by,” exclaimed Sandford as I entered, “Waters can lend you the sum for an hour or two—for a *consideration*,” he added in a whisper. “It will soon be returned.”

“No, thank you,” I answered coldly. “I never part with my money till I have lost it.”

A malignant scowl passed over the scoundrel's features ; but he made no reply. Ultimately it was decided that one of the fraternity should be despatched in search of the required amount. He was gone about half an hour, and returned with a bundle of notes. They were, as I hoped and expected, forgeries on foreign banks. Mr. Merton looked at and counted them, and play commenced.

As it went on, so vividly did the scene recall the evening that

had sealed my own ruin, that I grew dizzy with excitement, and drained tumbler after tumbler of water to allay the fevered throbbing of my veins. The gamblers were fortunately too much absorbed to heed my agitation. Merton lost continuously—without pause or intermission. The stakes were doubled—trebled—quadrupled! His brain was on fire; and he played, or rather lost, with the recklessness of a madman.

“Hark! what’s that?” suddenly exclaimed Sandford, from whose Satanic features the mask he had so long worn before Merton had been gradually slipping. “Did you not hear a noise below?”

*My* ear had caught the sound; and I could better interpret it than he. It ceased.

“Touch the signal-bell, Adolphe,” added Sandford.

Not only the play, but the very breathing of the villains, was suspended as they listened for the reply.

It came. The answering tinkle sounded once—twice—thrice. “All right!” shouted Sandford. “Proceed! The farce is nearly played out.”

I had instructed the officers that two of them in plain clothes should present themselves at the front door, obtain admission by means of the password I had given them, and immediately seize and gag the door-keeper. I had also acquainted them with the proper answer to the signal-ring—three distinct pulls at the bell-handle communicating with the first floor. Their comrades were then to be admitted, and they were all to silently ascend the stairs, and wait on the landing till summoned by me to enter and seize the gamblers. The back entrance to the house was also securely but unobtrusively watched.

One only fear disturbed me: it was lest the scoundrels should take alarm in sufficient time to extinguish the lights, destroy the forged papers, and possibly escape by some private passage which might, unknown to me, exist.

Rousing myself, as soon as the play was resumed, from the trance of memory by which I had been in some sort absorbed, and first ascertaining that the handles of my pistols were within easy reach—for I knew I was playing a desperate game with desperate men—I rose, stepped carelessly to the door, partially opened it, and bent forward, as if listening for a repetition of



the sound which had so alarmed the company. To my great delight the landing and stairs were filled with police-officers—silent and stern as death. I drew back, and walked towards the table at which Mr. Merton was seated. The last stake—an enormous one—was being played for. Merton lost. He sprang upon his feet, death-pale, despairing, overwhelmed, and a hoarse execration surged through his clenched teeth. Sandford and his associates coolly raked the plunder together, their features lighted up with fiendish glee.

“Villain!—traitor!—miscreant!” shrieked Mr. Merton, as if smitten with sudden frenzy, and darting at Sandford’s throat: “you, devil that you are, have undone, destroyed me!”

“No doubt of it,” calmly replied Sandford, shaking off his victim’s grasp; “and I think it has been very artistically and effectually done, too. Snivelling, my fine fellow, will scarcely help you much.”

Mr. Merton glared upon the taunting villain in speechless agony and rage.

“Not quite so fast, *Cardon*, if you please,” I exclaimed, at the same time taking up a bundle of forged notes. “It does not appear to me that Mr. Merton has played against equal stakes, for unquestionably this paper is not genuine.”

“Dog!” roared Sandford, “do you hold your life so cheap?” and he rushed towards me, as if to seize the forged notes.

I was as quick as he, and the levelled tube of a pistol sharply arrested his eager onslaught. The entire gang gathered near us, flaming with excitement. Mr. Merton looked bewilderedly from one to another, apparently scarcely conscious of what was passing around him.

“Wrench the papers from him!” screamed Sandford, recovering his energy. “Seize him—stab, strangle him!”

“Look to yourself, scoundrel!” I shouted with equal vehemence. “Your hour is come! Officers, enter and do your duty!”

In an instant the room was filled with police; and surprised, panic-stricken, paralysed by the suddenness of the catastrophe, the gang were all secured without the slightest resistance, though most of them were armed, and marched off in custody.

Three—Sandford, or *Cardon* (but he had half-a-dozen *aliases*),

one of them—were transported for life ; the rest were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. My task was effectually accomplished. My superiors were pleased to express very warm commendation of the manner in which I had acquitted myself ; and the first step in the promotion which ultimately led to my present position in another branch of the public service was soon afterwards conferred upon me. Mr. Merton had his bonds, obligations, jewels, and money, restored to him ; and taught wisdom by terrible experience, never again entered a gaming-house. Neither he nor his lady-mother was ungrateful for the service I had been fortunate enough to render them.



## CHAPTER II.

## GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

A FEW weeks after the lucky termination of the Sandford affair, I was engaged in the investigation of a remarkable case of burglary, accompanied by homicide, which had just occurred at the residence of Mr. Bagshawe, a gentleman of competent fortune, situated within a few miles of Kendal in Westmoreland. The particulars forwarded to the London police authorities by the local magistracy were briefly these :—

Mr. Bagshawe, who had been some time absent at Leamington, Warwickshire, with his entire establishment, wrote to Sarah King—a young woman left in charge of the house and property—to announce his own speedy return, and at the same time directing her to have a particular bedroom aired, and other household matters arranged, for the reception of his nephew, Mr. Robert Bristowe, who, having just arrived from abroad, would, he expected, leave London immediately for Five Oaks' House. The positive arrival of this nephew had been declared to several tradesmen of Kendal by King early in the day preceding the night of the murder and robbery; and by her directions butcher-meat, poultry, fish, and so on, had been sent by them to Five Oaks for his table. The lad who carried the fish home stated that he had seen a strange young gentleman in one of the sitting-rooms on the ground-floor through the half-opened door of the apartment. On the following morning it was discovered that Five Oaks' House had been, not indeed broken *into*, but broken *out of*. This was evident from the state of the door fastenings, and the servant-woman barbarously murdered. The neighbours found her lying quite dead and cold at the foot of the principal staircase, clothed only in her

night-gown and stockings, and with a flat chamber candlestick tightly grasped in her right hand. It was conjectured that she had been roused from sleep by some noise below, and having descended to ascertain the cause, had been mercilessly slain by the disturbed burglars. Mr. Bagshawe arrived on the following day, and it was then found that not only a large amount of plate, but between three and four thousand pounds in gold and notes—the produce of government stock sold out about two months previously—had been carried off. The only person, except his niece, who lived with him, that knew there was this sum in the house, was his nephew, Robert Bristowe, to whom he had written, directing his letter to the Hummums Hotel, London, stating that the sum for the long-contemplated purchase of Rylands had been some time lying idle at Five Oaks, as he had wished to consult him upon his bargain before finally concluding it. This Mr. Robert Bristowe was now nowhere to be seen or heard of; and what seemed to confirm beyond a doubt the—to Mr. Bagshawe and his niece—torturing, horrifying suspicion that this nephew was the burglar and assassin, a portion of the identical letter written to him by his uncle was found in one of the offices! As he was nowhere to be met with or heard of in the neighbourhood of Kendal, it was surmised that he must have returned to London with his booty; and a full description of his person, and the dress he wore, as given by the fishmonger's boy, was sent to London by the authorities. They also forwarded for our use and assistance one Josiah Barnes, a sly, sharp, vagabond-sort of fellow, who had been apprehended on suspicion, chiefly, or rather wholly, because of his former intimacy with the unfortunate Sarah King, who had discarded him, it seemed, on account of his incorrigibly idle, and in other respects disreputable habits. The *alibi* he set up was, however, so clear and decisive, that he was but a few hours in custody; and he now exhibited great zeal for the discovery of the murderer of the woman to whom he had, to the extent of his perverted instincts, been sincerely attached. He fiddled at the festivals of the humbler Kendalese; sang, tumbled, ventriloquised at their tavern orgies; and had he not been so very highly gifted, might, there was little doubt, have earned a decent living as a carpenter, to which profession his father, by dint of much exertion, had

about half-bred him. His principal use to us was, that he was acquainted with the features of Mr. Robert Bristowe; and accordingly, as soon as I had received my commission and instructions, I started off with him to the Hummums Hotel, Covent Garden. In answer to my inquiries it was stated that Mr. Robert Bristowe had left the hotel a week previously without settling his bill—which was, however, of very small amount, as he usually paid every evening—and had not since been heard of; neither had he taken his luggage with him. This was odd, though the period stated would have given him ample time to reach Westmoreland on the day it was stated that he *had* arrived there.

“What dress did he wear when he left?”

“That which he usually wore; a foraging-cap with a gold band, a blue military surtout coat, light trousers, and Wellington boots.”

The precise dress described by the fishmonger's errand-boy! We next proceeded to the Bank of England, to ascertain if any of the stolen notes had been presented for payment. I handed in a list of the numbers furnished by Mr. Bagshawe, and was politely informed that they had all been cashed early the day before by a gentleman in a sort of undress uniform, and wearing a foraging cap. Lieutenant James was the name indorsed upon them; and the address, Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was of course, a fictitious one. The cashier doubted if he should be able to swear to the person of the gentleman who changed the notes, but he had particularly noticed his dress. I returned to Scotland Yard to report *no* progress; and it was then determined to issue bills descriptive of Bristowe's person, and offering a considerable reward for his apprehension, or such information as might lead to it; but the order had scarcely been issued, when who should we see walking deliberately down the yard towards the police-office but Mr. Robert Bristowe himself, dressed precisely as before described! I had just time to caution the inspector not to betray any suspicion, but to hear his story, and let him quietly depart, and to slip with Josiah Barnes out of sight, when he entered, and made a formal but most confused complaint of having been robbed something more than a week previously—where or by whom he knew not—and after-

wards deceived, bamboozled, and led astray in his pursuit of the robbers, by a person whom he now suspected to be a confederate with them. Even of this latter personage he could afford no tangible information ; and the inspector having quietly listened to his statement—intended, doubtless, as a mystification—told him the police should make inquiries, and wished him good-morning. As soon as he had turned out of Scotland Yard by the street leading to the Strand, I was upon his track. He walked slowly on, but without pausing, till he reached the Saracen's Head, Snow-Hill, where, to my great astonishment, he booked himself for Westmoreland by the night-coach. He then walked into the inn, and seating himself in the coffee-room, called for a pint of sherry wine and some biscuits. He was now safe for a short period at any rate ; and I was about to take a turn in the street, just to meditate upon the most advisable course of action, when I espied three buckishly-attired, bold-faced-looking fellows—one of whom I thought I recognized, spite of his fine dress—enter the booking-office. Naturally anxious in my vocation, I approached as closely to the door as I could without being observed, and heard one of them—my acquaintance sure enough ; I could not be deceived in that voice—ask the clerk if there were any vacant places in the night coach to Westmoreland. To Westmoreland ! Why, what in the name of Mercury could a detachment of the swell-mob be wanting in that country of furze and frieze-coats ? The next sentence uttered by my friend, as he placed the money for booking three insides to Kendal on the counter, was equally, or perhaps more puzzling : “ Is the gentleman who entered the office just now—him with a foraging-cap I mean—to be our fellow-passenger ? ”

“ Yes, he has booked himself, and has, I think, since gone into the house.”

“ Thank you : good morning.”

I had barely time to slip aside into one of the passages, when the three gentlemen came out of the office, passed me, and swaggered out of the yard. Vague, undefined suspicions at once beset me, relative to the connection of these worthies with the “ foraging-cap ” and the doings at Kendal. There was evidently something in all this more than natural, if police philosophy



could but find it out. I resolved at all events to try ; and in order to have a chance of doing so, I determined to be of the party, nothing doubting that I should be able, in some way or other, to make one in whatever game they intended playing. I in my turn entered the booking-office, and finding there were still two places vacant, secured them both for James Jenkins and Josiah Barnes, countrymen and friends of mine, returning to the " north countrie."

I returned to the coffee-room, where Mr. Bristowe was still seated, apparently in deep and anxious meditation, and wrote a note, with which I despatched the inn porter. I had now ample leisure for observing the suspected burglar and assassin. He was a pale, intellectual-looking, and withal handsome young man, of about six-and-twenty years of age, of slight, but well-knit frame, and with the decided air—travel-stained and jaded as he appeared—of a gentleman. His look was troubled and careworn, but I sought in vain for any indication of the starting, nervous tremor always in my experience exhibited by even old practitioners in crime when suddenly accosted. Several persons had entered the room hastily, without causing him even to look up. I determined to try an experiment on his nerves, which I was quite satisfied no man who had recently committed a murder, and but the day before changed part of the produce of that crime into gold at the Bank of England, could endure without wincing. My object was, not to procure evidence producible in a court of law by such means, but to satisfy my own mind. I felt a growing conviction that, spite of appearances, the young man was guiltless of the deed imputed to him, and might be the victim, I could not help thinking, either of some strange combination of circumstances, or more likely, of a diabolical plot for his destruction, essential, possibly, to the safety of the real perpetrators of the crime ; very probably—so ran my suspicions—friends and acquaintances of the three gentlemen who were to be our fellow-travellers. My duty, I knew, was quite as much the vindication of innocence as the detection of guilt ; and if I could satisfy myself that he was not the guilty party, no effort of mine should be wanting, I determined, to extricate him from the perilous position in which he stood. I went out of the room, and remained absent for some

time, then suddenly entered with a sort of bounce, walked swiftly, and with a determined air, straight up to the box where he was seated, grasped him tightly by the arm, and exclaimed, roughly—

“So I have found you at last !”

There was no start, no indication of fear whatever—not the slightest; the expression of his countenance, as he peevishly replied—

“What the devil do you mean !” was simply one of surprise and annoyance.

“I beg your pardon,” I replied; “the waiter told me a friend of mine, one *Bagshawe*, who has given me the slip, was here, and I mistook you for him.”

He courteously accepted my apology, quietly remarking at the same time that though his own name was Bristowe, he had, oddly enough, an uncle in the country of the same name as the person I had mistaken him for. Surely, thought I, this man is guiltless of the crime imputed to him; and yet— At this moment the porter entered to announce the arrival of the gentleman I had sent for. I went out; and after giving the new-comer instructions not to lose sight of Mr. Bristowe, hastened home to make arrangements for the journey.

Transformed by the aid of a flaxen wig, broad-brimmed hat, green spectacles, and a multiplicity of waistcoats and shawls, into a heavy and elderly well-to-do personage, I took my way with Josiah Barnes—whom I had previously thoroughly drilled as to speech and behaviour towards our companions—to the Saracen’s Head a few minutes previous to the time for starting.

We found Mr. Bristowe already seated; but the “three friends,” I observed, were curiously looking on, desirous, no doubt, of ascertaining *who* were to be their fellow-travellers before venturing to coop themselves up in a space so narrow, and, under certain circumstances, so difficult of egress. My appearance, and that of Barnes—who, sooth to say, looked much more of a simpleton than he really was—quite reassured them, and in they jumped with confident alacrity. A few minutes afterwards the “all right” of the attending ostlers gave the signal for departure, and away we started.

A more silent, less social party, I never assisted at. What-

ever amount of "feast of reason" each or either of us might have silently enjoyed, not a drop of "flow of soul" welled up from one of the six insides. Every passenger seemed to have his own peculiar reasons for declining to display himself in either mental or physical prominence. Only one or two incidents—apparently unimportant, but which I carefully noted down in the tablet of my memory—occurred during the long, wearisome journey, till we stopped to dine at about thirty miles from Kendal; when I ascertained, from an overheard conversation of one of the three with the coachman, that they intended to get down at a roadside tavern more than six miles on this side of that place.

"Do you know this house they intend to stop at?" I inquired of my assistant, as soon as I got him out of sight and hearing at the back of the premises.

"Quite well; it is within about two miles of Five Oaks' House."

"Indeed! Then you must stop there too. It is necessary I should go on to Kendal with Mr. Bristowe; but you can remain and watch their proceedings."

"With all my heart."

"But what excuse can you make for remaining there, when they know you are booked for Kendal? Fellows of that stamp are keenly suspicious; and in order to be useful, you must be entirely unsuspected."

"Oh, leave that to me. I'll throw dust enough in their eyes to blind a hundred such as they, I warrant ye."

"Well, we shall see. And now to dinner."

Soon after, the coach had once more started. Mr. Josiah Barnes began drinking from a stone bottle which he drew from his pocket; and so potent must have been the spirit it contained, that he became rapidly intoxicated. Not only speech, but eyes, body, arms, legs, the entire animal, by the time we reached the inn where we had agreed he should stop, was thoroughly, hopelessly drunk; and so savagely quarrelsome, too, did he become, that I expected every instant to hear my real vocation pointed out for the edification of the company. Strange to say, utterly stupid and savage as he seemed, all dangerous topics were carefully avoided. When the coach stopped, he got out—how, I know not—and reeled and tumbled into the tap-room, from

which he declared he would not budge an inch till next day. Vainly did the coachman remonstrate with him upon his foolish obstinacy ; he might as well have argued with a bear ; and he at length determined to leave him to his drunken humour. I was out of patience with the fellow ; and snatching an opportunity when the room was clear, began to upbraid him for his vexatious folly. He looked sharply round, and then, his body as evenly balanced, his eye as clear, his speech as free as my own, crowed out in a low, exulting voice, " Didn't I tell you I'd manage it nicely ? " The door opened, and, in a twinkling, extremity of drunkenness, of both brain and limb, was again assumed with a perfection of acting I have never seen equalled. He had studied from nature, that was perfectly clear. I was quite satisfied, and with renewed confidence obeyed the coachman's call to take my seat. Mr. Bristowe and I were now the only inside passengers ; and as farther disguise was useless, I began stripping myself of my superabundant clothing, wig, spectacles, &c., and in a few minutes, with the help of a bundle I had with me, presented to the astonished gaze of my fellow-traveller the identical person that had so rudely accosted him in the coffee-room of the Saracen's Head Inn.

" Why, what, in the name of all that's comical, is the meaning of this ? " demanded Mr. Bristowe, laughing immoderately at my changed appearance.

I briefly and coolly informed him ; and he was for some minutes overwhelmed with consternation and astonishment. He had not, he said, even heard of the catastrophe at his uncle's. Still, amazed and bewildered as he was, no sign which I could interpret into an indication of guilt escaped him.

" I do not wish to obtrude upon your confidence, Mr. Bristowe," I remarked, after a long pause ; " but you must perceive that unless the circumstances I have related to you are in some way explained, you stand in a perilous predicament."

" You are right," he replied, after some hesitation. "*It is* a tangled web ; still, I doubt not that some mode of vindicating my perfect innocence will present itself."

He then relapsed into silence ; and neither of us spoke again till the coach stopped, in accordance with a previous intimation I had given the coachman, opposite the gate of the Kendal

prison. Mr. Bristowe started, and changed colour, but instantly mastering his emotion, he calmly said, "You of course but perform your duty ; mine is not to distrust a just and all-seeing Providence."

We entered the jail, and the necessary search of his clothes and luggage was effected as forbearingly as possible. To my great dismay we found amongst the money in his purse a Spanish gold piece of a peculiar coinage, and in the lining of his portmanteau, very dexterously hidden, a cross set with brilliants, both of which I knew, by the list forwarded to the London police, formed part of the plunder carried off from Five Oaks' House. The prisoner's vehement protestations that he could not conceive how such articles came into his possession, excited a derisive smile on the face of the veteran turnkey ; whilst I was thoroughly dumbfounded by the seemingly complete demolition of the theory of innocence I had woven out of his candid, open manner and unshakeable hardihood of nerve.

"I dare say the articles came to you in your sleep," sneered the turnkey, as we turned to leave the cell.

"Oh," I mechanically exclaimed, "in his sleep ! I had not thought of that !" The man stared ; but I had passed out of the prison before he could express his surprise or contempt in words.

The next morning the justice-room was densely crowded, to hear the examination of the prisoner. There was also a very numerous attendance of magistrates ; the case, from the position in life of the prisoner, and the strange and mysterious circumstances of the affair altogether, having excited an extraordinary and extremely painful interest amongst all classes in the town and neighbourhood. The demeanour of the accused gentleman was anxious certainly, but withal calm and collected ; and there was, I thought, a light of fortitude and conscious probity in his clear, bold eyes, which guilt never yet successfully simulated.

After the hearing of some minor evidence, the fishmonger's boy was called, and asked if he could point out the person he had seen at Five Oaks on the day preceding the burglary ? The lad looked fixedly at the prisoner for something more than a minute without speaking, and then said—

"The gentleman was standing before the fire when I saw

him, with his cap on. I should like to see this person with his cap on before I say anything."

Mr. Bristowe dashed on his foraging-cap, and the boy immediately exclaimed—

"That is the man!"

Mr. Cowan, a solicitor, retained by Mr. Bagshawe for his nephew, objected that this was, after all, only swearing to a cap, or at best to the *ensemble* of a dress, and ought not to be received. The chairman, however, decided that it must be taken *quantum valeat*, and in corroboration of other evidence. It was next deposed by several persons that the deceased Sarah King had told them that her master's nephew had positively arrived at Five Oaks. An objection to the reception of this evidence, as partaking of the nature of "hearsay," was also made, and similarly overruled. Mr. Bristowe begged to observe "that Sarah King was not one of his uncle's old servants, and was entirely unknown to him; it was quite possible, therefore, that he was personally unknown to her." The bench observed that all these observations might be fitly urged before a jury; but, in the present stage of the proceedings, were uselessly addressed to them, whose sole duty it was to ascertain if a sufficiently strong case of suspicion had been made out against the prisoner to justify his committal for trial. A constable next proved finding a portion of a letter, which he produced, in one of the offices of Five Oaks; and then Mr. Bagshawe was directed to be called in. The prisoner, upon hearing this order given, exhibited great emotion, and earnestly entreated that his uncle and himself might be spared the necessity of meeting each other for the first time, after a separation of several years, under such circumstances.

"We can receive no evidence against you, Mr. Bristowe, in your absence," replied the chairman, in a compassionate tone of voice; "but your uncle's deposition will occupy but a few minutes. It is, however, indispensable."

"At least, then, Mr. Cowan," said the agitated young man, "prevent my sister from accompanying her uncle: I could not bear *that*."

He was assured she would not be present; in fact, she had become seriously ill through anxiety and terror; and the crowded

assemblage awaited in painful silence the approach of the reluctant prosecutor.

He presently appeared—a venerable, white-haired man; seventy years old at least he seemed, his form bowed by age and grief, his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his whole manner indicative of sorrow and dejection. “Uncle!” cried the prisoner, springing towards him. The aged man looked up, seemed to read in the clear countenance of his nephew, a full refutation of the suspicions entertained against him, tottered forward with outspread arms, and, in the words of the Sacred text, “fell upon his neck, and wept,” exclaiming in choking accents, “Forgive me—forgive me, Robert, that I ever for a moment doubted you. Mary never did—never, Robert; not for an instant.”

A profound silence prevailed during this outburst of feeling, and a considerable pause ensued before the usher of the court, at a gesture from the chairman, touched Mr. Bagshawe’s arm, and begged his attention to the bench. “Certainly, certainly,” said he, hastily wiping his eyes, and turning towards the court. “My sister’s child, gentlemen,” he added, appealingly, “who has lived with me from childhood: you will excuse me, I am sure.”

“There needs no excuse, Mr. Bagshawe,” said the chairman, kindly; “but it is necessary this unhappy business should be proceeded with. Hand the witness the portion of the letter found at Five Oaks. Now, is that your handwriting; and is it a portion of the letter you sent to your nephew, informing him of the large sum of money kept for a particular purpose at Five Oaks?”

“It is.”

“Now,” said the clerk to the magistrates, addressing me, “please to produce the articles in your possession.”

I laid the Spanish coin and the cross upon the table.

“Please to look at those two articles, Mr. Bagshawe,” said the chairman. “Now, sir, on your oath, are they a portion of the property of which you have been robbed?”

The aged gentleman stooped forward and examined them earnestly; then turned and looked with quivering eyes, if I may be allowed the expression, in his nephew’s face; but returned no answer to the question.

"It is necessary you should reply, Yes or No, Mr. Bagshawe," said the clerk.

"Answer, uncle," said the prisoner soothingly; "fear not for me. God and my innocence to aid, I shall yet break through the web of villany in which I at present seem hopelessly involved."

"Bless you, Robert—bless you! I am sure you will. Yes, gentlemen, the cross and coin on the table are part of the property carried off."

A smothered groan, indicative of the sorrowing sympathy felt for the venerable gentleman, arose from the crowded court on hearing this declaration. I then deposed to finding them as previously stated. As soon as I concluded, the magistrates consulted together for a few minutes; and then the chairman, addressing the prisoner, said, "I have to inform you that the bench are agreed that sufficient evidence has been adduced against you to warrant them in fully committing you for trial. We are of course bound to hear anything you have to say; but such being our intention, your professional adviser will perhaps recommend you to reserve whatever defence you have to make for another tribunal: here it could not avail you."

Mr. Cowan expressed his concurrence in the intimation of the magistrate; but the prisoner vehemently protested against sanctioning by his silence the accusation preferred against him.

"I have nothing to reserve," he exclaimed, with passionate energy; "nothing to conceal. I will not owe my acquittal of this foul charge to any trick of lawyercraft. If I may not come out of this investigation with an untainted name, I desire not to escape at all. The defence, or rather the suggestive facts I have to offer for the consideration of the bench, are these:—On the evening of the day I received my uncle's letter I went to Drury Lane theatre, remaining out very late. On my return to the hotel, I found I had been robbed of my pocket-book, which contained not only that letter, and a considerable sum in bank-notes, but papers of great professional importance to me. It was too late to adopt any measures for its recovery that night; and the next morning, as I was dressing myself to go out, in order to apprise the police authorities of my loss, I was informed that a gentleman desired to see me instantly on important



business. He was shown up, and announced himself to be a detective police-officer : the robbery I had sustained had been revealed by an accomplice, and it was necessary I should immediately accompany him. We left the hotel together ; and after consuming the entire day in perambulating all sorts of bye-streets, and calling at several suspicious-looking places, my officious friend all at once discovered that the thieves had left town for the west of England, hoping, doubtless, to reach a large town, and get gold for the notes before the news of their having been stopped should have reached it. He insisted upon immediate pursuit. I wished to return to the hotel for a change of clothes, as I was but lightly clad, and night-travelling required warmer apparel. This he would not hear of, as the night coach was on the point of starting. He, however, contrived to supply me from his own resources with a great coat—a sort of policeman's cape—and a rough travelling-cap, which tied under the chin. In due time we arrived at Bristol, where I was kept for several days loitering about ; till, finally, my guide decamped, and I returned to London. An hour after arriving there, I gave information at Scotland Yard of what had happened, and afterwards booked myself by the night coach for Kendal. This is all I have to say."

This strange story did not produce the slightest effect upon the bench, and very little upon the auditory, and yet I felt satisfied it was strictly true. It was not half ingenious enough for a made-up story. Mr. Bagshawe, I should have stated, had been led out of the justice-hall immediately after he had finished his deposition.

"Then, Mr. Bristowe," said the magistrate's clerk, "assuming this curious narrative to be correct, you will be easily able to prove an *alibi* ?"

"I have thought over that, Mr. Clerk," returned the prisoner mildly, "and must confess that, remembering how I was dressed and wrapped up—that I saw but few persons, and those casually and briefly, I have strong misgivings of my power to do so."

"That is perhaps the less to be lamented," replied the county clerk, in a sneering tone, "inasmuch as the possession of those articles," pointing to the cross and coin on the table, "would necessitate another equally probable though quite different story."

"That is a circumstance," replied the prisoner, in the same calm tone as before, "which I cannot in the slightest manner account for."

No more was said, and the order for his committal to the county jail at Appleby on the charge of "wilful murder" was given to the clerk. At this moment a hastily-scrawled note from Barnes was placed in my hands. I had no sooner glanced over it than I applied to the magistrates for an adjournment till the morrow, on the ground that I could then produce an important witness, whose evidence at the trial it was necessary to assure. The application was, as a matter of course, complied with; the prisoner was remanded till the next day, and the court adjourned.

As I accompanied Mr. Bristowe to the vehicle in waiting to reconvey him to jail, I could not forbear whispering, "Be of good heart, sir, we shall unravel this mystery yet, depend upon it." He looked keenly at me; and then, without other reply than a warm pressure of the hand, jumped into the carriage.

"Well, Barnes," I exclaimed as soon as we were in a room by ourselves, and the door closed, "what is it you have discovered?"

"That the murderers of Sarah King are yonder at the Talbot where you left me."

"Yes: so I gather from your note. But what evidence have you to support your assertion?"

"This! Trusting to my apparent drunken imbecility, they occasionally dropped words in my presence which convinced me not only that they were the guilty parties, but that they had come down here to carry off the plate, somewhere concealed in the neighbourhood. This they mean to do to-night."

"Anything more?"

"Yes. You know I am a ventriloquist in a small way, as well as a bit of a mimic: well, I took occasion when the youngest of the rascals—the one that sat beside Mr. Bristow, and got out on the top of the coach the second evening, because freezing cold as it was, he said the inside was too hot and close"—

"Oh, I remember. Dolt that I was not to recall it before. But go on."

"Well, he and I were alone together in the parlour about three hours ago—I dead tipsy as ever—when he suddenly heard the voice of Sarah King at his elbow exclaiming, 'Who is that in the plate closet?' If you had seen the start of horror which he gave, the terror which shook his failing limbs as he glanced round the apartment, you would no longer have entertained a doubt on the matter."

"This is scarcely judicial proof, Barnes ; but I dare say we shall be able to make something of it. You return immediately ; about nightfall I will rejoin you in my former disguise."

It was early in the evening when I entered the Talbot, and seated myself in the parlour. Our three friends were present, and so was Barnes.

"Is not that fellow sober yet?" I demanded of one of them.

"No ; he has been lying about drinking and snoring ever since. He went to bed, I hear, this afternoon ; but he appears to be little the better for it."

I had an opportunity soon afterwards of speaking to Barnes privately, and found that one of the fellows had brought a chaise-cart and horse from Kendal, and that all three were to depart in about an hour, under pretence of reaching a town about fourteen miles distant, where they intended to sleep. My plan was immediately taken : I returned to the parlour, and watching my opportunity, whispered into the ear of the young gentleman whose nerves had been so shaken by Barnes' ventriloquism, and who, by the way, was *my* old acquaintance—"Dick Staples, I want a word with you in the next room." I spoke in my natural voice, and lifted, for his especial study and edification, the wig from my forehead. He was thunderstruck ; and his teeth chattered with terror. His two companions were absorbed over a low game at cards, and did not observe us. "Come," I continued in the same whisper, "there is not a moment to lose ; *if you would save yourself*, follow me !" He did so, and I led him into an adjoining apartment, closed the door, and drawing a pistol from my coat-pocket, said—"You perceive, Staples, that the game is up : you personated Mr. Bristowe at his uncle's house at Five Oaks, dressed in a precisely similar suit of clothes to that which he wears. You murdered the servant"—

"No—no—no, not I," gasped the wretch: "not I: I did not strike her."

"At all events you were present, and that, as far as the gallows is concerned, is the same thing. You also picked that gentleman's pocket during your journey from London, and placed one of the stolen Spanish pieces in his purse; you then went on the roof of the coach, and by some ingenious means or other contrived to secrete a cross set with brilliants in his port-manteau."

"What shall I do—what shall I do?" screamed the fellow, half dead with fear, and slipping down on a chair; "what shall I do to save my life—my life?"

"First get up and listen. If you are not the actual murderer"—

"I am not—upon my soul I am not!"

"If you are not, you will probably be admitted king's evidence; though, mind, I make no promises. Now, what is the plan of operations for carrying off the booty?"

"They are going in the chaise-cart almost immediately to take it up: it is hidden in the copse yonder. I am to remain here, in order to give an alarm should any suspicion be excited, by showing two candles at our bedroom window; and if all keeps right, I am to join them at the cross-roads, about a quarter of a mile from hence."

"All right. Now return to the parlour: I will follow you; and remember that on the slightest hint of treachery I will shoot you as I would a dog."

About a quarter of an hour afterwards his two confederates set off in the chaise-cart: I, Barnes, and Staples cautiously followed, the latter handcuffed, and superintended by the ostler of the inn, whom I for the nonce pressed into the king's service. The night was pitch dark fortunately, and the noise of the cart-wheels effectually drowned the sound of our footsteps. At length the cart stopped; the men got out, and were soon busily engaged in transferring the buried plate to the cart. We cautiously approached, and were soon within a yard or two of them, still unperceived.

"Get into the cart," said one of them to the other, "and I will hand the things up to you." His companion obeyed.

"Hollo!" cried the fellow. "I thought I told you"—

"That you are nabbed at last!" I exclaimed, tripping him suddenly up. "Barnes, hold the horse's head. Now, sir, attempt to budge an inch out of that cart, and I'll send a bullet through your brains." The surprise was complete; and so terror-stricken were they, that neither resistance nor escape was attempted. They were soon handcuffed and otherwise secured; the remainder of the plate was placed in the cart; and we made the best of our way to Kendal jail, where I had the honour of lodging them at about nine o'clock in the evening. The news, late as it was, spread like wildfire, and innumerable were the congratulations which awaited me when I reached the inn where I lodged. But that which recompensed me a thousandfold for what I had done, was the fervent embrace in which the white-haired uncle, risen from his bed to assure himself of the truth of the news, locked me, as he called down blessings from Heaven upon my head. There are blessed moments even in the life of a police-officer.

Mr. Bristowe was of course liberated on the following morning; Staples was admitted king's evidence; and one of his accomplices—the actual murderer—was hanged, the other transported. A considerable portion of the property was also recovered. The gentleman who—to give time and opportunity for the perpetration of the burglary, suggested by the perusal of Mr. Bagshawe's letter—induced Mr. Bristowe to accompany him to Bristol, was soon afterwards transported for another offence.



## CHAPTER III.

## X. Y. Z.

THE following advertisement appeared in several of the London journals in the year 1832 :—" If Owen Lloyd, a native of Wales, and who, it is believed, resided for many years in London as clerk in a large mercantile establishment, will forward his present address to X. Y. Z., Post Office, St. Martin's-le-Grand, to be left till called for, he will hear of something greatly to his advantage."

My attention had been attracted to this notice by its very frequent appearance in the journal which I was chiefly in the habit of reading; and, from my professional habits of thinking, I had set it down in my own mind as a *trap* for some offender against the principles of *meum* and *tuum*, whose presence in a criminal court was very earnestly desired. I was confirmed in this conjecture by observing that, in despair of Owen Lloyd's voluntary disclosure of his retreat, a reward of fifty guineas, payable by a respectable solicitor of Lothbury, was ultimately offered to any person who would furnish X. Y. Z. with the missing man's address. "An old bird," I mentally exclaimed, on perusing this paragraph, "and not to be caught with chaff, that is evident." Still more to excite my curiosity, and at the same time bring the matter within the scope of my own particular functions, I found, on taking up the "Police Gazette," a reward of thirty guineas offered for the *apprehension* of Owen Lloyd, whose person and manners were minutely described. "The pursuit grows hot," thought I, throwing down the paper, and hastening to attend a summons just brought me from the superintendent; "and if Owen Lloyd is still within the four seas, his chance of escape seems but a poor one."

On waiting on the superintendent I was directed to put myself in immediate personal communication with a Mr. Smith, the head of an eminent wholesale house in the city.

"In the city!"

"Yes; but your business with Mr. Smith is relative to the extensive robbery at his West-end residence a week or two ago. The necessary warrants for the apprehension of the suspected parties have been, I understand, obtained, and on your return will, together with some necessary memoranda, be placed in your hands."

I at once proceeded to my destination, and on my arrival, was immediately ushered into a dingy back-room, where I was desired to wait till Mr. Smith, who was just then busily engaged, could speak to me. Casting my eyes over a table, near which the clerk had placed me a chair, I perceived a newspaper and the "Police Gazette, in both of which the advertisements for the discovery of Owen Lloyd were strongly underlined. "Oh, oh," thought I; "Mr. Smith, then, is the X. Y. Z. who is so extremely anxious to renew his acquaintance with Mr. Owen Lloyd; and I am the honoured individual selected to bring about the desired interview. Well, it is in my new vocation—one which can scarcely be dispensed with, it seems, in this busy, scheming life of ours."

Mr. Smith did not keep me waiting long. He seemed a hard, shrewd, business man, whose still wiry frame, brisk, active gait and manner, and clear, decisive eye, indicated—though the snows of more than sixty winters had passed over his head—a yet vigorous life, of which the morning and the noon had been spent in the successful pursuit of wealth and its accompaniment—social consideration and influence.

"You have, I suppose, read the advertisements marked on these papers?"

"I have, and of course conclude that you, sir, are X. Y. Z."

"Of course, conclusions," rejoined Mr. Smith, with a quite perceptible sneer, "are usually very silly ones: in this instance especially so. My name, you ought to be aware, is Smith: X. Y. Z., whoever he may be, I expect in a few minutes. In just seventeen minutes," added the exact man of business; "for I, by letter, appointed him to meet me here at one o'clock

precisely. My motive, in seeking an interview with him, it is proper I should tell you, is the probability that he, like myself, is a sufferer by Owen Lloyd, and may not therefore object to defray a fair share of the cost likely to be incurred in unkennelling the delinquent, and prosecuting him to conviction; or, which would be far better, he may be in possession of information that will enable us to obtain completely the clue I already almost grasp. But we must be cautious; X. Y. Z. *may* be a relative or friend of Lloyd's, and in that case, to possess him of our plans would answer no purpose but to afford him an opportunity of baffling them. Thus much premised, I had better at once proceed to read over to you a few particulars I have jotted down, which, you will perceive, throw light and colour over the suspicions I have been within these few days compelled to entertain. You are doubtless acquainted with the full particulars of the robbery at my residence, Brook Street, last Thursday fortnight."

"Yes; especially the report of the officers, that the crime must have been committed by persons familiar with the premises and the general habits of the family."

"Precisely. Now, have you your memorandum-book ready?"

"Quite so."

"You had better write with ink," said Mr. Smith, pushing an inkstand and pens towards me. "Important memoranda should never, where there is a possibility of avoiding it, be written in pencil. Friction, thumbing, use of any kind, often partially obliterates them, creating endless confusion and mistakes. Are you ready?"

"Perfectly."

"Owen Lloyd, a native of Wales, and, it was understood, descended from a highly-respectable family there. About five feet eight; but I need not describe his person over again. Many years with us, first as junior, then as head clerk, during which his conduct, as regards the firm, was exemplary. A man of yielding, irresolute mind—if indeed a person can be said to really possess a mind at all who is always changing it for some other person's—incapable of saying 'No' to embarrassing, impoverishing requests—one in short, Mr. Waters, of that



numerous class of individuals whom fools say are nobody's enemies but their own, as if that were possible"—

"I understand; but I really do not see how this bears upon"—

"The mission you are directed to undertake? I think it does, as you will presently see. Three years ago, Owen Lloyd having involved himself, in consequence of the serious defect of character I have indicated, in large liabilities for pretended friends, left our employment; and to avoid a jail, fled, no one could discover whither. Edward Jones, also a native of the principality, whose description, as well as that of his wife, you will receive from the superintendent, was discharged about seven years since from our service for misconduct, and went, we understood, to America. He always appeared to possess great influence over the mind of his considerably younger countryman Lloyd. Jones and his wife were seen three evenings since by one of our clerks near Temple Bar. I am of opinion, Mr. Waters," continued Mr. Smith, removing his spectacles, and closing the note-book from which he had been reading, "that it is only the first step in crime, or criminal imprudence, which feeble-minded men especially long hesitate or boggle at; and I now more than suspect that, pressed by poverty, and very possibly yielding to the persuasions and example of Jones—who, by the way, was as well acquainted with the premises in Brook Street as his fellow-clerk—the once honest, ductile Owen Lloyd, is now a common thief and burglar."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. A more minute search led to the discovery, the day before yesterday, of a pocket-book behind some book-shelves in the library. As no property had been taken from that room—though the lock of a large iron chest, containing coins and medals, had been evidently tampered with—the search there was not at first very rigorous. That pocket-book—here it is—belonged, I know, to Owen Lloyd when in our service. See, here are his initials stamped on the cover."

"Might he not have inadvertently left it there when with you?"

"You will scarcely think so after reading the date of the five-pound note of the Hampshire County Bank which you will find within the inner lining."

"The date is 1831."

"Exactly. I have also strong reason for believing that Owen Lloyd is now, or has been lately, residing in some part of Hampshire."

"That is important."

"This letter," continued Mr. Smith; and then pausing for a brief space in some embarrassment, he added: "The commissioner informed me, Mr. Waters, that you were a person upon whose good sense and *discretion*, as well as sagacity and courage, every confidence might be placed. I therefore feel less difficulty than I otherwise should in admitting you a little behind the family screen, and entering with you upon matters one would not willingly have bruited to the public ear."

I bowed, and he presently proceeded.

"Owen Lloyd, I should tell you, is married to a very amiable, superior sort of woman, and has one child, a daughter named Caroline, an elegant, gentle-mannered, beautiful girl, I admit, to whom my wife was much attached, and she was consequently a frequent visitor in Brook Street. This I always felt was very imprudent; and the result was, that my son Arthur Smith—only about two years her senior; she was just turned of seventeen when her father was compelled to fly from his creditors—formed a silly boyish attachment for her. They have since, I gather from this letter, which I found yesterday in Arthur's dressing-room, carried on, at long intervals, a clandestine correspondence, waiting for the advent of more propitious times—which, being interpreted," added Mr. Smith, with a sardonic sneer, "means of course my death and burial."

"You are in possession, then, if Miss Caroline Lloyd is living with her father, of his precise place of abode?"

"Not exactly. The correspondence is, it seems, carried on without the knowledge of Owen Lloyd; and the girl states, in answer, it should seem, to Arthur's inquiries, that her father would never forgive her if, under present circumstances, she disclosed his place of residence—we can now very well understand that—and she entreats Arthur not to persist, at least for the present, in his attempts to discover her. My son, you must understand, is now of age, and so far as fortune is concerned, is,

thanks to a legacy from an aunt on his mother's side, independent of me."

"What post-mark does the letter bear?"

"Charing-Cross. Miss Lloyd states that it will be posted in London by a friend; that friend being, I nothing doubt, her father's confederate, Jones. But to us the most important part of the epistle is the following line:—'My father met with a sad accident in the forest some time ago, but is now quite recovered.' The words *in the forest* have, you see, been written over, but not so entirely as to prevent their being, with a little trouble, traced. Now, coupling this expression with the Hampshire bank-note, I am of opinion that Lloyd is concealed somewhere in the New Forest."

"A shrewd guess, at all events."

"You now perceive what weighty motives I have to bring this man to justice. The property carried off I care little comparatively about; but the intercourse between the girl and my son must at any cost be terminated"—

He was interrupted by a clerk, who entered to say that Mr. William Lloyd, the gentleman who had advertised as "X.Y.Z." desired to speak to him. Mr. Smith directed Mr. Lloyd to be shown in; and then, snatching up the "Police Gazette," and thrusting it into one of the table-drawers, said in a low voice, but marked emphasis, "A relative, no doubt, by the name; be silent, and be watchful."

A minute afterwards Mr. Lloyd was ushered into the room. He was a thin, emaciated, and apparently sorrow-stricken man, and on the wintry side of middle age, but of mild, courteous, gentlemanly speech and manners. He was evidently nervous and agitated, and after a word or two of customary salutation, said hastily, "I gather from this note, sir, that you can afford me tidings of my long-lost brother Owen; where is he?" He looked eagerly round the apartment, gazed with curious earnestness in my face, and then again turned with tremulous anxiety to Mr. Smith. "Is he dead? Pray do not keep me in suspense."

"Sit down, sir," said Mr. Smith, pointing to a chair. "Your brother, Owen Lloyd, was for many years a clerk in this establishment"—

"*Was—was!*" interrupted Mr. Lloyd, with greatly increased agitation; "not now, then—he has left you?"

"For upwards of three years. A few days ago—pray do not interrupt me—I obtained intelligence of him, which, with such assistance as you may possibly be able to afford, will perhaps suffice to enable this gentleman"—pointing to me—"to discover his present residence."

I could not stand the look which Mr. Lloyd fixed upon me, and turned hastily away to gaze out of the window, as if attracted by the noise of a squabble between two draymen which fortunately broke out at the moment in the narrow, choked-up street.

"For what purpose, sir, are you instituting this eager search after my brother? It cannot be that—No, no—he has left you, you say, more than three years; besides, the bare supposition is as wicked as absurd."

"The truth is, Mr. Lloyd," rejoined Mr. Smith, after a few moments' reflection, "there is great danger that my son may disadvantageously connect himself with your—with your brother's family—may, in fact, marry his daughter Caroline. Now I could easily convince Owen"—

"Caroline!" interjected Mr. Lloyd, with a tremulous accent, and his dim eyes suffused with tears—"Caroline! ay, truly, *her* daughter would be named Caroline." An instant after, he added, drawing himself up with an air of pride and some sternness: "Caroline Lloyd, sir, is a person who, by birth, and, I doubt not, character and attainments, is a fitting match for the son of the proudest merchant of this proud city."

"Very likely," rejoined Mr. Smith drily; "but you must excuse me for saying that, as regards *my* son, it is one which I will at any cost prevent."

"How am I to know," observed Mr. Lloyd, whose glance of pride had quickly passed away, "that you are dealing fairly and candidly with me in the matter?"

In reply to this home-thrust, Mr. Smith placed the letter, addressed by Miss Lloyd to his son, in the hands of the questioner, at the same time explaining how he had obtained it.

Mr. Lloyd's hand trembled, and his tears fell fast over the letter as he hurriedly perused it. It seemed by his broken,

involuntary ejaculations, that old thoughts and memories were deeply stirred within him. "Poor girl; so young, so gentle, and so sorely tried! Her mother's very turn of thought and phrase. Owen, too, artless, honourable, just as he was ever, except when the dupe of knaves and villains."

He seemed buried in thought for some time after the perusal of the letter; and Mr. Smith, whose cue it was to avoid exciting suspicion by too great eagerness of speech, was growing fidgety. At length, suddenly looking up, he said in a dejected tone, "If this is all you have ascertained, we seem as far off as ever. I can afford you no help."

"I am not sure of that," replied Mr. Smith. "Let us look calmly at the matter. Your brother is evidently not living in London, and that accounts for your advertisements not being answered."

"Truly."

"If you look at the letter attentively, you will perceive that three important words, 'in the forest,' have been partially erased."

"Yes, it is indeed so; but what"—

"Now, is there no particular locality in the country to which your brother would be likely to betake himself in preference to another? Gentlemen of fancy and sentiment," added Mr. Smith, "usually fall back, I have heard, upon some favourite haunt of early days when pressed by adversity."

"It is natural they should," replied Mr. Lloyd, heedless of the sneer. "I have felt that longing for old haunts and old faces in intense force, even when I was what the world calls prospering in strange lands; and how much more— But no; he would not return to Wales—to Caermarthen—to be looked down upon by those amongst whom our family for so many generations stood equal with the highest. Besides, I have personally sought him there—in vain."

"But his wife—*she* is not a native of the principality?"

"No. Ah! I remember. The forest! It must be so! Caroline Heyworth, whom we first met in the Isle of Wight, is a native of Beaulieu, a village in the New Forest, Hampshire. A small, very small property there, bequeathed by an uncle, belonged to her, and perhaps has not been disposed of. How

same I not to think of this before? I will set out at once—and yet pressing business requires my stay here for a day or two.”

“This gentleman, Mr. Waters, can proceed to Beaulieu immediately.”

“That must do then. You will call on me, Mr. Waters—here is my address—before you leave town. Thank you. And God bless you, sir,” he added, suddenly seizing Mr. Smith’s hand, “for the light you have thrown upon this wearying and, I feared, hopeless search. You need not be so anxious, sir, to send a special messenger to release your son from his promise of marriage to my niece. None of us, be assured, will be desirous of forcing her upon a reluctant family.” He then bowed, and withdrew.

“Mr. Waters,” said Mr. Smith, with a good deal of sternness, as soon as we were alone, “I expect that no sentimental crotchet will prevent your doing your duty in this matter?”

“What right,” I answered with some heat, “have you, sir, to make such an insinuation?”

“Because I perceived by your manner, that you disapproved my questioning Mr. Lloyd as to the likeliest mode of securing his brother.”

“My manner but interpreted my thoughts; still, sir, I know what belongs to my duty, and shall perform it.”

“Enough; I have nothing more to say.”

I drew on my gloves, took up my hat, and was leaving the room, when Mr. Smith exclaimed, “Stay one moment, Mr. Waters; you see that my great object is to break off the connection between my son and Miss Lloyd?”

“I do.”

“I am not anxious, you will remember, to press the prosecution, *if, by a frank written confession of his guilt*, Owen Lloyd places an insuperable bar between his child and mine. You understand?”

“Perfectly. But permit me to observe, that the *duty* you just now hinted I might hesitate to perform will not permit me to be a party to any such transaction. Good-day.”

I waited on Mr. William Lloyd soon afterwards, and listened with painful interest to the brief history which he, with child-like simplicity, narrated of his own and brother’s fortunes. It

was a sad, oft-told tale. They had been early left orphans; and, deprived of judicious guidance, had run—William more especially—a wild career of dissipation, till *all* was gone. Just before the crash came, they had both fallen in love with the same woman, Caroline Heyworth, who had preferred the meeker, more gentle-hearted Owen, to his elder brother. They parted in anger. William obtained a situation as bailiff and overseer of an estate in Jamaica, where, by many years of toil, good fortune, and economy, he at length ruined his health and restored his fortunes; and was now returned to die rich in his native country; and, as he had till an hour before feared, unlamented and untended save by hirelings. I promised to write immediately I had seen his brother; and with a sorrowful heart took leave of the vainly-rejoicing, prematurely-aged man.

I arrived at Southampton by the night-coach—the railway was but just begun, I remember—and was informed that the best mode of reaching Beaulieu—Bewley, they pronounced it—was by crossing the Southampton river to the village of Hythe, which was but a few miles distance from Beaulieu. As soon as I had breakfasted, I hastened to the quay, and was soon speeding across the tranquil waters in one of the sharp-stemmed wherries which plied constantly between the shores. My attention was soon arrested by two figures in the stern of the boat, a man and woman. A slight examination of their features sufficed to convince me that they were Jones and his wife. They evidently entertained no suspicion of pursuit; and as I heard them tell the boatman they were going on to *Bewley*, I determined for the present not to disturb their fancied security. It was fortunate I did so. As soon as we had landed, they passed into a mean-looking dwelling, which, from some nets, and a boat under repair, in a small yard in front of it, I concluded to be a fisherman's. As no vehicle could be readily procured, I determined on walking on, and easily reached Beaulieu, which is charmingly situated just within the skirts of the New Forest, about twelve o'clock. After partaking of a slight repast at the principal inn of the place—I forget its name; but it was, I remember, within a stone's-throw of the celebrated Beaulieu Abbey ruins—I easily contrived, by a few careless, indirect questions, to elicit all the information I required of the loqua-

rious waiting-maid. Mr. Lloyd, who seemed to bear an excellent character, lived, I was informed, at a cottage about half a mile distant from the inn, and chiefly supported himself as a measurer of timber—beech and ash: a small stock—the oak was reserved for government purposes—he usually kept on hand. Miss Caroline, the girl said, did beautiful fancy-work; and a group of flowers painted by her, as natural as life, was framed and glazed in the bar, if I would like to see it. Upon the right track, sure enough! Mr. Lloyd, there could be no longer a doubt, had unconsciously betrayed his unfortunate, guilty brother into the hands of justice, and I, an agent of the iron law, was already upon the threshold of his hiding-place. I felt no pleasure at the success of the scheme. To have bravely and honestly stood up against an adverse fate for so many years, only to fall into crime just as fortune had grown weary of persecuting him, and a long-estranged brother had returned to raise him and his to their former position in society, was melancholy indeed! And the young woman, too, whose letter breathed so pure, so gentle, so patient a spirit!—it would not bear thinking about—and I resolutely strove to look upon the affair as one of every-day routine. It would not do, however; and I was about to quit the room in no very enviable frame of mind, when my boat companions, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, entered, and seated themselves at one of the tables. The apartment was rather a large one, and as I was seated in the corner of a box at some distance from the entrance, they did not at first observe me; and several words caught my ear which awakened a strong desire to hear more. That I might do so, I instantly adopted a very common, but not the less often very successful device. As soon as the new-comers perceived me, their whispered colloquy stopped abruptly; and after a minute or so, the man said, looking hard at me, "Good day, sir; you have had rather a long walk;" and he glanced at my dusty boots.

"Sir," I replied, enclosing my ear with my left hand in the manner of a natural ear-trumpet, "did you speak?"

"A dusty walk," he rejoined in a voice that might have been heard in a hurricane or across Fleet Street.

"One o'clock!" I replied, pulling out my watch. "No: it wants a quarter yet."



"Deaf as the Monument," said Jones to his companion. "All right."

The suspended dialogue was but partially resumed.

"Do you think," said the woman, after the lapse of about five minutes—"do you think Owen and his family will go with us? I hope not."

"Not he: I only asked him just for the say-so of the thing. He is too chicken-hearted for that, or for anything else that requires pluck."

Finishing the spirits and water they had ordered, they soon afterwards went out. I followed.

As soon as we had gone about a hundred paces from the house, I said, "Pray can you tell me which is Mr. Lloyd the beech-merchant's house?"

"Yes," replied the man, taking hold of my arm, and hallooing into my ear with a power sufficient to really deafen one for life: "we are going there to dine."

I nodded comprehension, and on we journeyed. We were met at the door by Owen Lloyd himself—a man in whose countenance guilelessness, even to simplicity, seemed stamped by nature's own true hand. So much, thought I, for the reliance to be placed on physiognomy! "I have brought you a customer," said Mr. Jones: "but he is as deaf as a stone." I was courteously invited in by signs; and with much hallooing and shouting, it was finally settled that, after dinner, I should look over Mr. Lloyd's stock of wood. Dinner had just been placed on the table by Mrs. Lloyd and her daughter. A still very comely, interesting woman was Mrs. Lloyd, though time and sorrow had long since set their unmistakeable seals upon her. Her daughter was, I thought, one of the most charming, graceful young women I had ever seen, spite of the tinge of sadness which dwelt upon her sweet face, deepening its interest if it somewhat diminished its beauty. My heart ached to think of the misery the announcement of my errand must presently bring on such gentle beings—innocent, I felt confident, even of the knowledge of the crime that had been committed. I dreaded to begin—not, Heaven knows, from any fear of the men, who, compared with me, were poor, feeble creatures, and I could easily have mastered half-a-dozen such; but the females—that

young girl especially—how encounter *their* despair? I mutely declined dinner, but accepted a glass of ale, and sat down till I could muster sufficient resolution for the performance of my task; for I felt this was an opportunity of quietly effecting the capture of both the suspected criminals which *must* not be neglected.

Dinner was just over when Mrs. Lloyd said, "Oh, Mr. Jones, have you seen anything of my husband's pocket-book? It was on a shelf in the room where you slept—not the *last* time, but when you were here about three weeks ago. We can find it nowhere; and I thought you might possibly have taken it by mistake."

"A black, common-looking thing?" said Jones.

"Yes."

"I *did* take it by mistake. I found it in one of my parcels, and put it in my pocket, intending of course to return it when I came back; but I remember, when wanting to open a lock of which I had lost the key, taking it out to see if it contained a pencil-case, which I thought might answer the purpose; and finding none, tossing it away in a pet, I could not afterwards find it."

"Then it is lost?"

"Yes; but what of that? There was nothing in it."

"You are mistaken," rejoined Owen; "there was a five-pound country note in it, and the loss will—What is the matter, friend?"

I had sprung upon my feet with uncontrollable emotion; Mr. Lloyd's observation recalled me to myself, and I sat down again, muttering something about a sudden pain in the side.

"Oh, if that's the case," said Jones, "I'll make it up willingly. I am pretty rich, you know, just now."

"We shall be much obliged to you," said Mrs. Lloyd; "its loss would be a sad blow to us."

"How came you to send those boxes here, Jones?" said Owen Lloyd. "Would it not have been better to have sent them direct to Portsmouth, where the vessel calls?"

"I had not quite made up my mind to return to America then; and I knew they would be safer here than anywhere else."

"When do you mean to take them away? We are so badly off for room, that they terribly hamper us."

"This evening, about nine o'clock. I have hired a smack at Hythe to take us, bag and baggage, down the river to meet the liner which calls off Portsmouth to-morrow. I wish we could persuade you to go with us."

"Thank you, Jones," replied Owen, in a dejected tone, "I have very little to hope for here; still my heart clings to the old country."

I had heard enough; and hastily rising, intimated a wish to look at the timber at once. Mr. Lloyd immediately rose, and Jones and his wife left the cottage to return to Hythe at the same time that we did. I marked a few pieces of timber, and promising to send for them in the morning, hastened away.

A mountain seemed removed from off my breast, I felt as if I had achieved a great personal deliverance. Truly a wonderful interposition of Providence, I thought, that has so signally averted the fatal consequences likely to have resulted from the thoughtless imprudence of Owen Lloyd, in allowing his house to be made, however innocently, a receptacle for stolen goods, at the solicitations, too, of a man whose character he knew to be none of the purest. He had a narrow escape, and might with perfect truth exclaim—

"There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will."

The warrants of which I was the bearer the London police authorities had taken care to get endorsed by a magistrate of the county of Hampshire, who happened to be in London, so that I found no difficulty in arranging effectually for the capture and safe custody of Jones and his assistants when he came to fetch his booty.

I had just returned to the Beaulieu inn, after completing my arrangements, when a carriage drove furiously up to the door, and who should, to my utter astonishment, alight, but Mr. William Lloyd, and Messrs. Smith, father and son. I hastened out, and briefly enjoining caution and silence, begged them to step with me into a private room. The agitation of Mr. Lloyd

and of Mr. Arthur Smith was extreme, but Mr. Smith appeared cold and impassive as ever. I soon ascertained that Arthur Smith, by his mother's assistance, I suspect, had early penetrated his father's schemes and secrets, and had, in consequence, caused Mr. William Lloyd to be watched home, with whom, immediately after I had left, he had a long conference. Later in the evening an *éclaircissement* with the father took place ; and after a long and stormy discussion, it was resolved that all three should the next morning post down to Beaulieu, and act as circumstances might suggest. My story was soon told. It was received of course with unbounded joy by the brother and lover ; and even through the father's apparent indifference I could perceive that his refusal to participate in the general joy would not be of long duration. The large fortune which Mr. William Lloyd intimated his intention to bestow upon his niece was a new and softening element in the affair.

Mr. Smith, senior, ordered his dinner ; and Mr. Lloyd and Arthur Smith—but why need I attempt to relate what *they* did ? I only know that when, a long time afterwards, I ventured to look in at Mr. Owen Lloyd's cottage, all the five inmates—brother, uncle, lover, niece, and wife—were talking, laughing, weeping, smiling, like distracted creatures, and seemed utterly incapable of reasonable discourse. An hour after that, as I stood screened by a belt of forest-trees in wait for Mr. Jones and company, I noticed, as they all strolled past me in the clear moonlight, that the tears, the agitation had passed away, leaving only smiles and grateful joy on the glad faces so lately clouded by anxiety and sorrow. A mighty change in so brief a space !

Mr. Jones arrived with his cart and helpers in due time. A man who sometimes assisted in the timber-yard was deputed, with an apology for the absence of Mr. Lloyd, to deliver the goods. The boxes, full of plate and other valuables, were soon hoisted in, and the cart moved off. I let it proceed about a mile, and then, with the help I had placed in readiness, easily secured the astounded burglar and his assistants ; and early the next morning Jones was on his road to London. He was tried at the ensuing Old Bailey sessions, convicted, and transported for life ; and the discretion I had exercised in not

executing the warrant against Owen Lloyd was decidedly approved of by the authorities.

It was about two months after my first interview with Mr. Smith that, on returning home one evening, my wife placed before me a piece of bride-cake, and two beautifully-engraved cards united with white satin ribbon, bearing the names of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Smith. I was more gratified by this little act of courtesy for Emily's sake, as those who have temporarily fallen from a certain position in society will easily understand, than I should have been by the costliest present. The service I had rendered was purely accidental : it has nevertheless been always kindly remembered by all parties whom it so critically served.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE WIDOW.

IN the winter of 1833 I was hurriedly, and, as I at the time could not help thinking, precipitately despatched to Guernsey, one of the largest of the islands which dot the British Channel, in quest of a gentleman of, till then, high character on the Stock Exchange, who, it was alleged, had absconded with a very large sum of money intrusted to him for investment by a baronet of considerable influence in official quarters. From certain circumstances, it was surmised that Guernsey would be his first hiding-place, and I was obliged to post all the way to Weymouth in order to save the mail packet, which left that place on the Saturday evening, or night rather, with the Channel-Island mails. Mr. — had gone, it was conjectured, by way of Southampton. My search, promptly and zealously as I was aided by the Guernsey authorities, proving vain, I determined on going on to Jersey, when a letter arrived by post informing me that the person of whom I was in pursuit had either not intended to defraud his client, or that his heart had failed him at the threshold of crime. A few hours after I had left London he had reappeared, it seems, in his counting-house, after having a few minutes previously effected the investment of the money in accordance with his client's instructions, and was now, through his attorney, threatening the accuser and all his aiders and abettors with the agreeable processes that in England usually follow sharply at the heels of such rash and hasty proceedings.

My mission over, I proposed to retrace my steps immediately; but unfortunately found myself detained in the island for nearly a week by the hurricane-weather which suddenly set in, rendering

it impossible for the mail or other steam packets to cross the Channel during its continuance. Time limped slowly and heavily away ; and frequently, in my impatience to be gone, I walked down to the bleak pier, and strained my eyes in the direction in which the steamer from Jersey *should* appear. Almost every time I did so I encountered two persons, who, I could see, were even more impatient to be gone than myself, and probably, I thought, with much more reason. They were a widow lady, not certainly more than thirty years of age, and her son, a fine, curly-haired boy, about eight or nine years old, whose natural light-heartedness appeared to be checked, subdued, by the deep grief and sadness which trembled in his mother's fine, expressive eyes, and shrouded her pale but handsome face. He held her by the hand ; often clasping it with both his tiny ones, and looking up to her as she turned despondingly away from the vacant roadstead and raging waters, with a half-frightened, half-wondering expression of anxious love, which would frequently cause his mother to bend down, and hurriedly strive to kiss away the sorrowful alarm depicted in the child's face. These two beings strangely interested me ; chiefly perhaps because, in my compelled idleness, I had little else except the obstinate and angry weather to engage my attention or occupy my thoughts. There was an unmistakeable air of "better days" about the widow—a grace of manner which her somewhat faded and unseasonable raiment rendered but the more striking and apparent. Her countenance, one perceived at the first glance, was of remarkable comeliness ; and upon one occasion that I had an opportunity of observing it, I was satisfied that, under happier influences than now appeared to overshadow her, those pale, interesting features would light up into beauty as brilliant as it was refined and intellectual.

This introduces another walking mystery, which, for want of something better to do, I was conjuring out of my fellow-watchers on the pier. He was a stoutish, strongly-set man of forty years of age, perhaps scarcely so much, showily dressed in new, glossy clothes ; French-varnished boots, thin-soled enough, winter as it was, for a drawing-room ; hat of the latest *gent* fashion ; a variegated satin cravat, fastened by two enormous-headed gold pins, connected with a chain ; and a heavy gold

chain fastened from his watch waistcoat-pocket over his neck. The complexion of his face was a cadaverous white, liberally sprinkled and relieved with gin and brandy blossoms, whilst the coarseness of his not over-clean hands was with singular taste set off and displayed by some half-dozen glittering rings. I felt a growing conviction, especially on noticing a sudden change in the usual cunning, impudent, leering expression of his eyes, as he caught me looking at him with some earnestness, that I had somewhere had the honour of a previous introduction to him. That he had not been, lately at all events, used to such resplendent habiliments as he now sported, was abundantly evident from his numerous smirking self-surveys as he strutted jauntily along, and frequent stoppings before shops that, having mirrors in their windows, afforded a more complete view of his charming person. This creature I was convinced was in some way or other connected, or at any rate acquainted, with the young and graceful widow. He was constantly dogging her steps; and I noticed with surprise, and some little irritation, that his vulgar bow was faintly returned by the lady as they passed each other; and that her recognition of him, slight and distant as it was, was not unfrequently accompanied by a blush, whether arising from a pleasurable emotion or the reverse I could not for some time determine. There is a mystery about blushes, I was and am quite aware, not easily penetrable, more especially about those of widows. I was soon enlightened upon that point. One day, when she happened to be standing alone on the pier, her little boy was gazing through a telescope I had borrowed of the landlord of the hotel where I lodged—he approached, and before she was well aware of his intention, took her hand, uttering at the same time, it seemed, some words of compliment. It was then I observed her features literally flash with a vividness of expression which revealed a beauty I had not before imagined she possessed. The fellow absolutely recoiled before the concentrated scorn which flushed her pale features, and the indignant gesture with which she withdrew her hand from the contamination of his touch. As he turned confusedly and hastily away, his eyes encountered mine, and he muttered some unintelligible sentences, during which the widow and her son left the spot.

“The lady,” said I, as soon as she was out of hearing,



"seems in a cold, bitter humour this morning; not unlike the weather."

"Yes, Mr. Wat—— I beg pardon, Mr. What's-your-name, I would say?"

"Waters, as I perceive you know quite well. My recollection of you is not so distinct. I have no remembrance of the fashionable clothes and brilliant jewellery, none whatever; but the remarkable countenance I *have* seen."

"I dare say you have, Waters," he replied, reassuming his insolent, swaggering air. "I practise at the Old Bailey; and I have several times seen you there, not, as now, in the masquerade of a gentleman, but with a number on your collar."

I was silly enough to feel annoyed for a moment at the fellow's stupid sarcasm, and turned angrily away.

"There, don't fly into a passion," continued he, with an exulting chuckle. "I have no wish to be ill friends with so smart a hand as you are. What do you say to a glass or two of wine, if only to keep this confounded wind out of our stomachs? It's cheap enough here."

I hesitated a few seconds, and then said, "I have no great objection; but first, whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"Mr. Gates. William Gates, *Esquire*, attorney-at-law."

"Gates! Not the Gates, I hope, in the late Bryant affair?"

"Well—yes; but allow me to say, Waters, that the observations of the judge on that matter, and the consequent proceedings, were quite unjustifiable; and I was strongly advised to petition the House on the subject; but I forbore, perhaps unwisely."

"From consideration chiefly, I dare say, for the age and infirmities of his lordship and his numerous family?"

"Come, come," rejoined Gates, with a laugh; "don't poke fun in that way. The truth is, I get on quite as well without as with the certificate. I transact business now for Mr. Everard Preston: you understand?"

"Perfectly. I now remember where I have seen you. But how is it your dress has become so suddenly changed? A few weeks ago, it was nothing like so magnificent."

"True, my dear boy, true: quite right. I saw you observed that. First-rate, isn't it? Every article genuine. Bond and

Regent Street, I assure you," he added, scanning himself complacently over. I nodded approval, and he went on—"You see I have had a windfall; a piece of remarkable luck; and so I thought I would escape out of the dingy, smoky village, and air myself for a few days in the Channel."

"A delightful time of the year for such a purpose, truly. Rather say you came to improve your acquaintance with the lady yonder, who, I dare say, will not prove ultimately inflexible."

"Perhaps you are right—a little at least you may be, about the edges. But here we are; what do you take—port?"

"That as soon as anything else."

Mr. Gates was, as he said, constitutionally thirsty, and although it was still early in the day, drank with great relish and industry. As he grew flushed and rosy, and I therefore imagined communicative, I said, "Well, now, tell me who and what is that lady."

The reply was a significant compound gesture, comprising a wink of his left eye and the tap of a forefinger upon the right side of his nose. I waited, but the pantomimic action remained uninterpreted by words.

"Not rich, apparently?"

"Poor as Job."

"An imprudent marriage, probably?"

"Guess again, and I'll take odds you'll guess wrong; but suppose, as variety is charming, we change the subject. What is your opinion now of the prospects of the Ministry?"

I saw it was useless attempting to extract any information from so cunning a rascal; and hastily excusing myself, I rose, and abruptly took my leave, more and more puzzled to account for the evident connection, in some way or other, of so fair and elegant a woman with a low attorney, struck off the rolls for fraudulent misconduct, and now acting in the name of a person scarcely less disreputable than himself. On emerging from the tavern, I found that the wind had not only sensibly abated, but had become more favourable to the packet's leaving Jersey, and that early the next morning we might reasonably hope to embark for Weymouth. It turned out as we anticipated. The same boat which took me off to the roads conveyed also the

widow—Mrs. Grey, I saw by the cards on her modest luggage—and her son. Gates followed a few minutes afterwards, and we were soon on our stormy voyage homewards.

The passage was a very rough, unpleasant one, and I saw little of the passengers in whom, in spite of myself, as it were, I continued to feel so strong an interest, till the steamer was moored alongside the Weymouth quay, and we stood together for a brief space, awaiting the scrutiny and questionings of the officers of the customs. I bowed adieu as I stepped from the paddle-box to the shore, and thought, with something of a feeling of regret, that in all probability I should never see either of them again. I was mistaken, for on arriving early the next morning to take possession of the outside place booked for me by the coach to London through Southampton, I found Mrs. Grey and her son already seated on the roof. Gates came hurriedly a few minutes afterwards, and ensconced himself snugly inside. The day was bitterly cold, and the widow and her somewhat delicate-looking boy were but poorly clad for such inclement weather. The coachman and myself, however, contrived to force some rough, stout cloaks upon their acceptance, which sufficed pretty well during the day; but as night came on rainy and tempestuous as well as dark and bleak, I felt that they must be in some way or other got inside, where Gates was the only passenger. Yet so distant, so frigidly courteous was Mrs. Grey, that I was at a loss how to manage it. Gates, I saw, was enjoying himself hugely to his own satisfaction. At every stage he swallowed a large glass of brandy-and-water, and I observed that he cast more and more audaciously-triumphant glances towards Mrs. Grey. Once her eye, though studiously, I thought, averted from him, caught his, and a deep blush, in which fear, timidity, and aversion seemed strangely mingled, swept over her face. What *could* it mean? It was, however, useless to worry myself further with profitless conjectures, and I descended from the roof to hold a private parley with the coachman. A reasonable bargain was soon struck: he went to Mrs. Grey and proposed to her, as there was plenty of room to spare, that she and her son should ride inside.

“It will make no difference in the fare,” he added, “and it’s bitter cold out here for a lady.”

"Thank you," replied the widow after a few moments' hesitation; "we shall do very well here."

I guessed the cause of her refusal, and hastened to add, "You had better, I think, accept the coachman's proposal; the night-weather will be dreadful, and even I, a man, must take refuge inside." She looked at me with a sort of grateful curiosity, and then accepted, with many thanks, the coachman's offer.

When we alighted at the Regent Circus, London, I looked anxiously but vainly round for some one in attendance to receive and greet the widow and her son. She did not seem to expect any one, but stood gazing vacantly; yet sadly, at the noisy, glaring, hurrying scene around her, her child's hand clasped in hers with an unconsciously tightening grasp, whilst her luggage was removed from the roof of the coach. Gates stood near, as if in expectation that his services must now, however unwillingly, be accepted by Mrs. Grey. I approached her, and said somewhat hurriedly, "If, as I apprehend, madam, you are a stranger in London, and consequently in need of temporary lodgings, you will, I think, do well to apply to the person whose address I have written on this card. It is close by. He knows me, and on your mentioning my name, will treat you with every consideration. I am a police-officer; here is my address; and any assistance in my power shall, in any case," and I glanced at Gates, "be freely rendered to you." I then hastened off; and my wife an hour afterwards was even more anxious and interested for the mysterious widow and her son than myself.

About six weeks had glided away, and the remembrance of my fellow-passengers from Guernsey was rapidly falling into indistinctness, when a visit from Roberts, to whose lodgings I had recommended Mrs. Grey, brought them once more painfully before me. That the widow was poor I was not surprised to hear; but that a person so utterly destitute of resources and friends, as she appeared from Roberts' account to be, should have sought the huge wilderness of London, seemed marvellous. Her few trinkets, and nearly all her scanty wardrobe, Roberts more than suspected were at the pawnbroker's. The rent of the lodgings had not been paid for the last month, and he believed that for some time past they had not had a sufficiency of food,

and were *now* in a state of literal starvation! Still, she was cold and distant as ever, complained not, though daily becoming paler, thinner, weaker.

"Does Gates the attorney visit her?" I asked.

"No—she would not see him, but letters from him are almost daily received."

Roberts, who was a widower, wished my wife to see her; he was seriously apprehensive of some tragical result; and this, apart from considerations of humanity, could not be permitted for his own sake to occur in his house. I acquiesced; and Emily hurriedly equipped herself, and set off with Roberts to Sherrard Street, Haymarket.

On arriving at home, Roberts, to his own and my wife's astonishment, found Gates there in a state of exuberant satisfaction. He was waiting to pay any claim Roberts had upon Mrs. Grey, to whom, the ex-attorney exultingly announced, he was to be married on the following Thursday! Roberts, scarcely believing his ears, hastened up to the first floor, to ascertain if Mrs. Grey had really given authority to Gates to act for her. He tapped at the door, and a faint voice bidding him enter, he saw at once what had happened. Mrs. Grey, pale as marble, her eyes flashing with almost insane excitement, was standing by a table, upon which a large tray had been placed, covered with soups, jellies, and other delicacies, evidently just brought in from a tavern, eagerly watching her son partake of the first food he had tasted for two whole days! Roberts saw clearly how it was, and stammering a foolish excuse of having tapped at the wrong door, hastened away. She had at last determined to sacrifice herself to save her child's life! Emily, as she related what she had seen and heard, wept with passionate grief, and I was scarcely less excited: the union of Mrs. Grey with such a man seemed like the profanation of a pure and holy shrine. Then Gates was, spite of his windfall, as he called it, essentially a needy man! Besides—and this was the impenetrable mystery of the affair—what inducement, what motive could induce a mercenary wretch like Gates to unite himself in marriage with poverty—with destitution? The notion of his being influenced by sentiment of any kind was, I felt, absurd. The more I reflected on the matter, the more convinced I

became that there was some villanous scheme in process of accomplishment by Gates, and I determined to make at least one resolute effort to arrive at a solution of the perplexing riddle. The next day, having a few hours to spare, the thought struck me that I would call on Mrs. Grey myself. I accordingly proceeded towards her residence, and in Coventry Street happened to meet Jackson, a brother officer, who, I was aware from a few inquiries I had previously made, knew something of Gates' past history and present position. After circumstantially relating the whole matter, I asked him if he could possibly guess what the fellow's object could be in contracting such a marriage?

"Object!" replied Jackson; "why, money of course: what else? He has by some means become aware that the lady is entitled to property, and he is scheming to get possession of it as her husband."

"My own conviction! Yet the difficulty of getting at any proof seems insurmountable."

"Just so. And, by the way, Gates is certainly in high feather just now, however acquired. Not only himself, but Rivers, his cad—clerk he calls himself—has cast his old greasy skin, and appears quite spruce and shining. And—now I remember—what did you say was the lady's name?"

"Grey."

"Grey! Ah, then I suppose it can have nothing to do with it! It was a person of the name of Welton or Skelton that called on us a month or two ago about Gates."

"What was the nature of the communication?"

"I can hardly tell you: the charge was so loosely made, and hurriedly withdrawn. Skelton—yes, it *was* Skelton—he resides in pretty good style at Knightsbridge—called and said that Gates had stolen a cheque or draft for five hundred pounds, and other articles sent through him to some house in the city, of which I think he said the principal was dead. He was advised to apply through a solicitor to a magistrate, and went away, we supposed for that purpose; but about three hours afterwards he returned, and in a hurried, flurried sort of way said he had been mistaken, and that he withdrew every charge he had made against Mr. Gates."

“ Very odd.”

“ Yes; but I don't see how it can be in any way connected with this Mrs. Grey's affair. Still, do you think it would be of any use to sound Rivers? I know the fellow well, and where I should be pretty sure to find him this evening.”

It was arranged he should do so, and I proceeded on to Sherrard Street. Mrs. Grey was alone in the front apartment of the ground-floor, and received me with much politeness. She had, I saw, been weeping; her eyes were swollen and blood-shot; and she was deadly pale; but I looked in vain for any indication of that utter desolation which a woman like her, condemned to such a sacrifice, might naturally be supposed to feel. I felt greatly embarrassed as to how to begin; but at length I plunged boldly into the matter; assured her she was cruelly deceived by Gates, who was in no condition to provide for her and her son in even tolerable comfort; and that I was convinced he had no other than a mercenary and detestable motive in seeking marriage with her. Mrs. Grey heard me in so totally unmoved a manner, and the feeling that I was really meddling with things that did not at all concern me, grew upon me so rapidly, as I spoke to that unanswering countenance, that by the time I had finished my eloquent harangue, I was in a perfect fever of embarrassment and confusion, and very heartily wished myself out of the place. To my further bewilderment, Mrs. Grey, when I had quite concluded, informed me—in consideration, she said, of the courtesies I had shown her when we were fellow-travellers—that she was perfectly aware Mr. Gates' motive in marrying her was purely a mercenary one; and her own in consenting to the union, except as regarded her son, was, she admitted, scarcely better. She added—riddle upon riddles!—that she knew also that Mr. Gates was very poor—insolvent, she understood. I rose mechanically to my feet, with a confused notion swimming in my head that both of us at all events could not be in our right senses. This feeling must have been visible upon my face; for Mrs. Grey added with a half-smile, “ You cannot reconcile these apparent contradictions; be patient; you will perfectly comprehend them before long. But as I wish not to stand too low in your estimation, I must tell you that Mr. Gates is to subscribe a written agreement that we

separate the instant the ceremony has been performed. But for that undertaking, I would have suffered any extremity, death itself, rather than have consented to marry him ! ”

Still confused, stunned as it were, by what I had heard, my hand was on the handle of the door to let myself out, when a thought arose in my mind. “ Is it possible, Mrs. Grey,” I said, “ that you can have been deceived into a belief that such a promise, however formally set down, is of the slightest legal value ? —that the law recognises, or would enforce, an instrument to render nugatory the solemn obligation you will, after signing it, make, ‘ to love, honour, obey, and cherish your husband ’ ? ” I had found the right chord at last. Mrs. Grey, as I spoke, became deadly pale ; and had she not caught at one of the heavy chairs, she would have been unable to support herself.

“ Do I understand you to say,” she faintly and brokenly gasped, “ that such an agreement as I have indicated, duly sealed and witnessed, could not be summarily enforced by a magistrate ? ”

“ Certainly it could not, my dear madam, and well Gates knows it to be so ; and I am greatly mistaken in the man, if, once the irrevocable ceremony over, he would not be the first to deride your credulity.”

“ If that be so,” exclaimed the unfortunate lady, with passionate despair, “ I am indeed ruined—lost ! Oh, my darling boy, would that you and I were sleeping in your father’s quiet grave ! ”

“ Say not so,” I exclaimed with emotion, for I was afflicted by her distress. “ Honour me with your confidence, and all may yet be well.”

After much entreaty, she despairingly complied. The substance of her story, which was broken by frequent outbursts of grief and lamentation, was as follows :—She was the only child of a London merchant—Mr. Walton we will call him—who had lived beyond his means, and failed ruinously to an immense amount. His spirits and health were broken by this event, which he survived only a few months. It happened that about the time of the bankruptcy she had become acquainted with Mr. John Grey, the only son of an eminent East India merchant, but a man of penurious disposition and habits.



“Mr. Ezekiel Grey?”

The same. They became attached to each other, deeply so; and knowing that to solicit the elder Grey's consent to their union would be tantamount to a sentence of immediate separation and estrangement, they unwisely, thoughtlessly, married, about ten months after Mr. Walton's death, without the elder Grey's knowledge. Gates, an attorney, then in apparently fair circumstances, with whom young Mr. Grey had become acquainted, and Anne Crawford, Maria Walton's servant, were the witnesses of the ceremony, which, after due publication of banns, was celebrated in St. Giles's church. The young couple, after the marriage, lived in the strictest privacy, the wife meagrely supported by the pocket-money allowance of Mr. Ezekiel Grey to his son. Thus painfully elapsed nine years, when, about twelve months previous to the present time, Mr. Grey determined to send his son to Bombay, in order to the arrangement of some complicated claims on a house of agency there. It was decided that, during her husband's absence, Mrs. John Grey should reside in Guernsey, partly with a view to economy, and partly for the change of air, which it was said their son required—Mr. Gates to be the medium through which money and letters were to reach the wife. Mr. Ezekiel Grey died somewhat suddenly about four months after his son's departure from England, and Mrs. Grey had been in momentary expectation of the arrival of her husband, when Gates came to Guernsey, and announced his death at Bombay, just as he was preparing for the voyage to England! The manner of Gates was strange and insolent; and he plainly intimated that without his assistance both herself and child would be beggars; and that assistance he audaciously declared he would only afford at the price of marriage! Mrs. Grey, overwhelmed with grief for the loss of a husband by whom she had been as constantly as tenderly beloved, and dizzy with ill-defined apprehension, started at once for London. A copy of the will of Mr. Ezekiel Grey had been procured, by which in effect he devised all his estate, real and personal, to his son; but in the event of Mr. John Grey dying unmarried, or without lawful issue, it went to his wife's nephew, Mr. Skelton—

“Skelton of Knightsbridge?”

Yes, in case of Mr. John Grey marrying, Skelton was to be paid an immediate legacy of five thousand pounds. So far, then, as fortune went, the widow and her son seemed amply provided for. So Mrs. Grey thought till she had another interview with Gates, who unblushingly told her that unless she consented to marry him, he would not prove, though he had abundant means of doing so, that the person she had married at St. Giles's church was the son of Ezekiel Grey, the eminent merchant! "The name," said the scoundrel, "will not help you; there are plenty of John Greys on that register; and as for Anne Crawford, she has been long since dead." Mrs. Grey next called on Mr. Skelton, and was turned out of the house as an impostor; and finally, having parted with everything upon which she could raise money, and Gates reiterating his offer, or demand rather, accompanied by the proposal of an immediate separation, she had consented.

"Courage, madam!" I exclaimed, at the end of her narrative, of which the above is the substance, and I spoke in a tone of joyous confidence, which, more than my words, reassured her; "I already see glimpses of daylight through this maze of villany. Gates has played a desperate game certainly, but one which we shall, you may rely on it, easily baffle."

A knock at the door interrupted me. I peered through the blind, and saw that it was Gates. "Silence—secrecy!" I emphatically urged, in a low voice, and with my finger on my lip, and left the room before the street door could be answered; and by my friend Roberts' contrivance, I was in a few minutes afterwards in the street, all the time unobserved by the intruder.

The next day early Jackson called on me. He had seen Rivers, but he seemed to know nothing, except, indeed, that it was quite true that Gates had received a five hundred pound draft from a house in India, which he, Rivers, had got notes for at the Bank of England. There were also in the same parcel a gold watch, he knew, and some jewellery, but from whom it all came, he, Rivers, was ignorant. Nothing but that had Jackson been able to discover.

"Call you that nothing?" said I, starting up, and hastily swallowing my last cup of coffee. "It is enough, at all events, to transport William Gates, Esquire."

I had to wait that morning on especial business on the commissioner; and after the business upon which I had been summoned had been dispatched, I related the case of Grey *versus* Gates as clearly and succinctly as I could. He listened with great attention, and in about a quarter of an hour I left him with as clear and unmistakable a path before me as it was possible to desire. I was passing down the stairs, when I was re-summoned.

"You quite understand, Waters, that Skelton is not for a moment to be lost sight of till his deposition has been taken?"

"Certainly, sir."

"That will do then."

Arrived at home, I dispatched my wife in a cab for Mrs. Grey. She soon arrived, and as much as was necessary of our plan I confided to her. Mr. Gates had pressed her earnestly that the ceremony should take place on the following morning. By my directions she now wrote, although her trembling fingers made an almost unintelligible scrawl of it, that as it *was* to be, she agreed to his proposition, and should expect him at nine o'clock.

Two hours afterwards, Jackson and I, having previously watched the gentleman home, knocked at Mr. Skelton's house, Knightsbridge, and requested to see him. At the very moment he came out of a side room, and was proceeding up-stairs.

"Mr. Skelton," said I, stepping forward, "I must have a private interview with you!" He was in an instant as pale as a corpse, and shaking like an aspen—such miserable cowards does an evil conscience make men—and totteringly led the way, without speaking, to a small library.

"You know me, Mr. Skelton, and doubtless guess the meaning of my errand?"

He stammered out a denial, which his trembling accents and ashy countenance emphatically denied.

"You and Gates of the Minorities are engaged in a felonious conspiracy to deprive Mrs. Grey and her infant son of their property and inheritance!"

Had he been struck by a cannon-shot, he could not have fallen more suddenly and helplessly upon the couch close to which he was standing.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "what is this?"

Perceiving he was quite sufficiently frightened, I said, "There is no wish on Mrs. Grey's part to treat you harshly, so that you aid us in convicting Gates. For this purpose you must at once give the numbers of the notes obtained for the cheque, and also the letter in which the agent at Bombay announced its transmission through Gates."

"Yes—yes!" he stammered, rising, and going to a *secrétaire*. "There is the letter."

I glanced over it. "I am glad to find," I said, that you did not know by this letter that the money and other articles here enumerated had been sent by the dying husband to his wife through Gates."

"I most solemnly assure you I did not!" he eagerly replied; "until—until—"

"Mr. Gates informed you of it, and seduced you to conspire with him. He has been playing a double game. Whilst amusing you, he purposes marrying Mrs. Grey to-morrow morning!"

"Is it possible. But I suspected—"

"No doubt. In the meantime, you will, if you please, accompany us. There is every desire to spare you," I added, perceiving him hesitate; "but our orders are peremptory." With a very ill grace Mr. Skelton complied, and we were rapidly driven off.

The next morning, Jackson, Skelton, and myself, were in Sherrard Street before daybreak. Mrs. Grey was already up, and at eight o'clock we sat down with her and her son to an excellent breakfast. She was charmingly dressed in the wedding garments which Gates had purchased with her stolen money, and I almost felt it in my heart to pity the unfortunate bridegroom, rascal as he was, about to be suddenly disappointed of such a bride and such a fortune! It was very necessary that she should be so arrayed, for, as we had thought quite probable, Rivers called a few minutes past eight with a present of jewellery, and the bride's appearance must have completely disarmed any suspicion which his master might have entertained.

Breakfast was over; Mrs. Grey, with her son, was seated on

a couch in the front room, and we were lying *perdu* in the next apartment, separated only by folding-doors, when a coach drew up before the house; a bridegroom's impatient summons thundered at the door; and presently forth stepped Mr. Gates, resplendently attired, followed by his man Rivers, who was, it appeared, to give the bride away. Mr. Gates entered the presence of beautiful Mrs. Grey in immense triumph. He approached her with the profoundest gallantry, and was about to speak, when Jackson and I, who had been sedulously watching through the chink of the slightly-opened doors, advanced into the room, followed by Mr. Skelton. His attitude of terror and surprise was one of the most natural performances I ever witnessed. He turned instinctively as if to flee. My grasp was in an instant on his collar.

"The game is up, my good Mr. Gates. I arrest you for felony!"

"Felony!"

"Ah, truly. For stealing a gold watch, diamond pin, and a cheque for five hundred pounds, sent through you to this lady."

All his insolent swagger vanished in an instant, and the abject scoundrel threw himself at Mrs. Grey's feet, and absolutely howled for mercy.

"I will do anything," he gaspingly protested; "anything you require, so that you will save me from these men!"

"Where is Crawford?" I asked, desirous of taking immediate, but not, I hope, unfair, advantage of the rascal's terror; "she who witnessed this lady's marriage?"

"At Leamington, Warwickshire," he replied.

"Very good. Now, Mrs. Grey, if you will leave us, I shall be obliged. We must search this gentleman, and perhaps"—

She vanished in an instant; her gentleness of disposition was, I saw, rapidly mastering all resentment. I carried the watch we took out of Gate's pocket to her, and she instantly recognized it to be her husband's. A fifty and a twenty-pound bank-note, corresponding to the numbers on our list, we extricated from the disappointed bridegroom's pocket-book. "And now, sir, if you please," said I, "we will adjourn to your lodgings."

A savage scowl was his only reply, not at all discomposing to

me, and we were soon busy ransacking his hidden hoards. We found several other articles sent by Mr. John Grey to his wife, and three letters to her, which, as corroborative evidence, would leave no doubt as to *who* her husband was. Our next visit was to a police-court, where Mr. William Gates was fully committed for trial. He was in due time convicted of stealing the watch, and sentenced to transportation for seven years.

Mrs. Grey's marriage, and her son's consequent succession to the deceased merchant's wealth, were not disputed. She has never remarried, and lives now in beneficent affluence in one of the new squares beyond the Edgware Road with her son, who, though now six-and-twenty years of age, or thereabouts, is still unappropriated; but "the good time is coming," so at least hinted a few days ago the fashionable "Morning Post."



## CHAPTER V.

## THE TWINS.

THE records of police-courts afford but imperfect evidence of the business really effected by the officers attached to them. The machinery of English criminal law is, in practice, so subservient to the caprice of individual prosecutors, that instances are constantly occurring in which flagrant violations of natural justice are, from various motives, corrupt and otherwise, withdrawn not only from the cognisance of judicial authority, but from the reprobation of public opinion. Compromises are usually effected between the apprehension of the inculpated parties and the public examination before a magistrate. The object of prosecution has been perhaps obtained by the preliminary step of arrest, or a criminal understanding has been arrived at in the interval; and it is then found utterly hopeless to proceed, however manifest may have appeared the guilt of the prisoner. If you adopt the expedient of compelling the attendance of the accused, it is, in nine cases out of ten, mere time and trouble thrown away. The utter forgetfulness of memory, the loose recollection of facts so vividly remembered but a few hours before, the delicately-scrupulous hesitation to depose confidently to the clearest verities evinced by the reluctant prosecutor, render a conviction almost impossible; so that, except in cases of flagrant and startling crimes, which are of course earnestly prosecuted by the Crown lawyers, offences against "our sovereign lady the Queen, her crown, and dignity," as criminal indictments run, if no aggrieved subject voluntarily appears to challenge justice on behalf of his liege lady, remain unchastised, and not unfrequently unexposed. From several examples of this prevalent abuse which have come within my own know-

ledge, I select the following instance, merely changing the names of the parties :—

My services, the superintendent late one afternoon informed me, were required in a perplexed and entangled affair, which would probably occupy me for some time, as orders had been given to investigate the matter thoroughly. "There," he added, "is a Mr. Repton, a highly respectable country solicitor's card. He is from Lancashire, and is staying at Webb's Hotel, Piccadilly. You are to see him at once. He will put you in possession of all the facts—surmises rather, I should say, for the facts, to my apprehension, are scant enough—connected with the case, and you will then use all possible diligence to ascertain first, if the alleged crime has been really committed, and if so, of course to bring the criminal or criminals to justice."

I found Mr. Repton, a stout, bald-headed, gentlemanly person, apparently about sixty years of age, just in the act of going out. "I have a pressing engagement for this evening, Mr. Waters," said he, after glancing at the introductory note I had brought, "and cannot possibly go into the business with the attention and minuteness it requires till the morning. But I'll tell you what; one of the parties concerned, and the one, too, with whom you will have especially to deal, is, I know, to be at Covent Garden Theatre this evening. It is of course necessary that you should be thoroughly acquainted with his person; and if you will go with me in the cab that is waiting outside, I will step with you into the theatre, and point him out." I assented; and on entering Covent Garden pit, Mr. Repton, who kept behind me to avoid observation, directed my attention to a group of persons occupying the front seats of the third box in the lower tier from the stage, on the right-hand side of the house. They were—a gentleman of about thirty years of age; his wife, a very elegant person, a year or two younger; and three children, the eldest of whom, a boy, could not have been more than six or seven years old. This done, Mr. Repton left the theatre, and about two hours afterwards I did the same.

The next morning I breakfasted with the Lancashire solicitor by appointment. As soon as it was concluded, business was at once entered upon.



"You closely observed Sir Charles Malvern yesterday evening, I presume?" said Mr. Repton.

"I paid great attention to the gentleman you pointed out to me," I answered, "if he be Sir Charles Malvern."

"He is, or at least— But of that presently. First let me inform you that Malvern, a few months ago, was a beggared gamester, or nearly so, to speak with precision. He is now in good bodily health, has a charming wife, and a family to whom he is much attached, an unencumbered estate of about twelve thousand a-year, and has not gambled since he came into possession of the property. This premised, is there, think you, anything remarkable in Sir Charles's demeanour?"

"Singularly so. My impression was that he was labouring under a terrible depression of spirits, caused, I imagined, by pecuniary difficulties. His manner was restless, abstracted. He paid no attention whatever to anything going on on the stage, except when his wife or one of the children especially challenged his attention; and then, a brief answer returned, he relapsed into the same restless unobservance as before. He is very nervous too. The box door was suddenly opened once or twice, and I noticed his sudden start each time."

"You have exactly described him. Well, that perturbed, unquiet feverishness of manner has constantly distinguished him since his accession to the Redwood Estates, and only since then. It strengthens me and one or two others in possibly an unfounded suspicion, which— But I had better, if I wish to render myself intelligible, relate matters in due sequence.

"Sir Thomas Redwood, whose property in Lancashire is chiefly in the neighbourhood of Liverpool, met his death, as did his only son, Mr. Archibald Redwood, about six months ago, in a very sudden and shocking manner. They were out trying a splendid mare for the first time in harness which Sir Thomas had lately purchased at a very high price. Two grooms on horseback were in attendance, to render assistance if required, for the animal was a very powerful, high-spirited one. All went very well till they arrived in front of Mr. Meredith's place, Oak Villa. This gentleman has a passion for firing off a number of brass cannon on the anniversary of such events as he deems worthy of the honour. This happened, unfortunately, to

be one of Mr. Meredith's gunpowder days ; and as Sir Thomas and his son were passing, a stream of light flashed directly in the eyes of the mare, followed by the roar of artillery, at no more than about ten paces off. The terrified animal became instantly unmanageable, got the bit between her teeth, and darted off at the wildest speed. The road is a curved and rugged one ; and after tearing along for about half a mile, the off-wheel of the gig came, at an abrupt turn, full against a milestone. The tremendous shock hurled the two unfortunate gentlemen upon the road with frightful violence, tore the vehicle almost completely asunder, and so injured the mare, that she died the next day. The alarmed grooms, who had not only been unable to render assistance, but even to keep up with the terrified mare, found Mr. Archibald Redwood quite dead. The spine had been broken close to the nape of the neck ; his head, in fact, was doubled up, so to speak, under the body. Sir Thomas still breathed, and was conveyed to Redwood Manor-house. Surgical assistance was promptly obtained ; but the internal injuries were so great that the excellent old gentleman expired in a few hours after he had reached his home. I was hastily sent for ; and when I arrived, Sir Thomas was still fully conscious. He imparted to me matters of great moment, to which he requested I would direct, after his decease, my best care and attention. His son, I was aware, had but just returned from a tour on the Continent, where he had been absent for nearly a twelve-month ; but I was not aware, neither was his father till the day before his death, that Mr. Archibald Redwood had not only secretly espoused a Miss Ashton—of a reduced family, but belonging to our best gentry—but had returned home, not solely for the purpose of soliciting Sir Thomas's forgiveness of his unauthorised espousals, but that the probable heir of Redwood might be born within the walls of the ancient manor-house.

After the first burst of passion and surprise, Sir Thomas, one of the best-hearted men in the universe, cordially forgave his son's disobedience—partly, and quite rightly, imputing it to his own foolish urgency in pressing a union with one of the Lacy family, with which the baronet was very intimate, and whose estate joined his.

“ Well, this lady, now a widow, had been left by her husband

at Chester, whilst he came on to seek an explanation with his father. Mr. Archibald Redwood was to have set out the next morning in one of Sir Thomas's carriages to bring home his wife; and the baronet, with his dying breath, bade me assure her of his entire forgiveness, and his earnest hope and trust that through her offspring the race of the Redwoods might be continued in a direct line. The family estates, I should tell you, being strictly entailed on heirs male, devolved, if no son of Mr. Archibald Redwood should bar his claim, upon Charles Malvern, the son of a cousin of the late Sir Thomas Redwood. The baronet had always felt partiality towards Malvern, and had assisted him pecuniarily a hundred times. Sir Thomas also directed me to draw as quickly as I could a short will bequeathing Mr. Charles Malvern twenty thousand pounds out of the personals. I wrote as expeditiously as I could, but by the time the paper was ready for his signature, Sir Thomas was no longer conscious. I placed the pen in his hand, and I fancied he understood the purpose, for his fingers closed faintly upon it; but the power to guide was utterly gone, and only a slight, scrambling stroke marked the paper as the pen slid across it in the direction of the falling arm.

"Mr. Malvern arrived at the manor-house about an hour after Sir Thomas breathed his last. It was clearly apparent through all his sorrow, partly real, I have no doubt, as well as partly assumed, that joy, the joy of riches, splendour, station, was dancing at his heart, and, spite of all his efforts to subdue or conceal it, sparkling in his eye. I briefly, but as gently as I could, acquainted him with the true position of affairs. The revulsion of feeling which ensued entirely unmanned him; and it was not till an hour afterwards that he recovered his self-possession sufficient to converse reasonably and coolly upon his position. At last he became apparently reconciled to the sudden overclouding of his imaginatively-brilliant prospects, and it was agreed that as he was a relative of the widow, he should at once set off to break the sad news to her. Well, a few days after his departure, I received a letter from him, stating that Lady Redwood—I don't think, by the way, that as her husband died before succeeding to the baronetcy, she is entitled to that appellation of honour; we, however, call her so out of courtesy

—that Lady Redwood, though prematurely confined in consequence of the intelligence of her husband's untimely death, had given birth to a female child, and that both mother and daughter were as well as could be expected. This, you will agree, seemed perfectly satisfactory?"

"Entirely so."

"So I thought. Mr. Malvern was now unquestionably, whether Sir Charles Malvern or not, the proprietor of the Redwood estates, burthened as with a charge, in accordance with the conditions of the entails, of a thousand pounds life annuity to the late Mr. Redwood's infant daughter.

"Sir Charles returned to Redwood Manor-house, where his wife and family soon afterwards arrived. Lady Redwood had been joined, I understood, by her mother, Mrs. Ashton, and would, when able to undertake the journey, return to her maternal home. It was about two months after Sir Thomas Redwood's death that I determined to pay Lady Redwood a visit, in order to the winding up of the personal estate, which it was desirable to accomplish as speedily as possible; and then a new and terrible light flashed upon me."

"What, in heaven's name!" I exclaimed, for the first time breaking silence—"what could there be to reveal?"

"Only," rejoined Mr. Repton, "that ill, delirious as Lady Redwood admitted herself to have been, it was her intimate, unconquerable conviction *that she had given birth to twins!*"

"Good God! And you suspect"——

"We don't know what to suspect. Should the lady's confident belief be correct, the missing child might have been a boy. You understand?"

"I do. But is there any tangible evidence to justify this horrible suspicion?"

"Yes; the surgeon-apothecary and his wife, a Mr. and Mrs. Williams, who attended Lady Redwood, have suddenly disappeared from Chester, and from no explainable motive, having left or abandoned a fair business there."

"That has certainly an ugly look."

"True; and a few days ago I received information that Williams has been seen in Birmingham. He was well dressed, and not apparently in any business."

"There certainly appears some ground for suspicion. What plan of operations do you propose?"

"That," replied Mr. Repton, "I must leave to your more practised sagacity. I can only undertake that no means shall be lacking that may be required."

"It will be better, perhaps," I suggested, after an interval of reflection, "that I should proceed to Birmingham at once. You have of course an accurate description of the persons of Williams and his wife ready?"

"I have; and very accurate pen and ink sketches I am told they are. Besides these, I have also here," continued Mr. Repton, taking from his pocket-book a sheet of carefully-folded satin paper, "a full description of the female baby, drawn up by its mother, under the impression that twins always—I believe they generally do—closely resemble each other. 'Light hair, blue eyes, dimpled chin'—and so on. The lady—a very charming person, I assure you, and meek and gentle as a fawn—is chiefly anxious to recover her child. You and I, should our suspicions be confirmed, have other duties to perform."

This was pretty nearly all that passed, and the next day I was in Birmingham.

The search, as I was compelled to be very cautious in my inquiries, was tedious, but finally successful. Mr. and Mrs. Williams I discovered living in a pretty house, with neat grounds attached, about two miles out of Birmingham, on the coach road to Wolverhampton. Their assumed name was Burrridge, and I ascertained from the servant-girl who fetched their dinner and supper beer, and occasionally wine and spirits, from a neighbouring tavern, that they had one child, a boy, a few months old, of whom neither father nor mother seemed very fond. By dint of much perseverance, I at length got upon pretty familiar terms with Mr. Burrridge, *alias* Williams. He spent his evenings regularly in a tavern; but with all the painstaking, indefatigable ingenuity I employed, the chief knowledge I acquired, during three weeks of assiduous endeavour, was, that my friend Burrridge intended, immediately after a visit which he expected shortly to receive from a rich and influential relative in London, to emigrate to America, at all events to go abroad. This was, however, very significant and precious information; and very

rarely indeed was he, after I had obtained it, out of my sight or observation. At length perseverance obtained its reward. One morning I discerned my friend, much more sprucely attired than ordinarily, make his way to the railway station, and there question with eager looks every passenger that alighted from the first-class carriages. At last a gentleman, whom I instantly recognised, spite of his shawl and other wrappings, arrived by the express train from London. Williams instantly accosted him, a cab was called, and away they drove. I followed in another, and saw them both alight at a hotel in New Street. I also alighted, and was mentally debating how to proceed, when Williams came out of the tavern, and proceeded in the direction of his home. I followed, overtook him, and soon contrived to ascertain that he and his wife had important business to transact in Birmingham the next morning, which would render it impossible he should meet me, as I proposed, till two or three o'clock in the afternoon at the earliest; and the next morning, my esteemed friend informed me, he would leave the place, probably for ever. An hour after this interesting conversation, I, accompanied by the chief of the Birmingham police, was closeted with the landlord of the hotel in New Street, a highly respectable person, who promised us every assistance in his power. Sir Charles Malvern had, we found, engaged a private room for the transaction of important business with some persons he expected in the morning, and our plans were soon fully matured and agreed upon.

I slept little that night, and immediately after breakfast hastened with my Birmingham colleague to the hotel. The apartment assigned for Sir Charles Malvern's use had been a bedroom, and a large wardrobe, with a high wing at each end, still remained in it. We tried if it would hold us, and with very little stooping and squeezing, found it would do very well. The landlord soon gave us the signal to be on the alert, and in we jammed ourselves, locking the wing-doors on the inside. A minute or two afterwards Sir Charles and Mr. and Mrs. Williams entered, and paper, pens, and ink having been brought, business commenced in right earnest. Their conversation it is needless to detail. It will suffice to observe that it was manifest Sir Charles, by a heavy bribe, had induced the

accoucheur and his wife to conceal the birth of the male child, which, as I suspected, was that which Williams and his spouse were bringing up as their own. I must do the fictitious baronet the justice to say that he had from the first the utmost anxiety that no harm should befall the infant. Mr. Malvern's nervous dread lest his confederates should be questioned, had induced their hurried departure from Chester, and it now appeared that he had become aware of the suspicions entertained by Mr. Repton, and could not rest till the Williamses and the child were safe out of the country. It was now insisted, by the woman more especially, that the agreement for the large annual payment to be made by Sir Charles should be fairly written out and signed in "plain black and white," to use Mrs. Williams's expression, in order that no future misunderstandings might arise. This Mr. Malvern strongly objected to; but finding the woman would accept of no other terms, he sullenly complied, and at the same time reiterated, that if any harm should befall the boy—to whom he intended, he said, to leave a handsome fortune—he would cease, regardless of consequences to himself, to pay the Williamses a single shilling.

A silence of several minutes followed, broken only by the scratching of the pen on the paper. The time to me seemed an age, squeezed, crooked, stifled as I was in that narrow box, and so I afterwards learned it did to my fellow-sufferer. At length Mr. Malvern said, in the same cautious whisper in which they had all hitherto spoken, "This will do, I think;" and read what he had written. Mr. and Mrs. Williams signified their approval; and as matters were now fully ripe, I gently turned the key, and very softly pushed open the door. The backs of the amiable trio were towards me, and as my boots were off, and the apartment was thickly carpeted, I approached unperceived, and to the inexpressible horror and astonishment of the parties concerned, whose heads were bent eagerly over the important document, a hand, which belonged to neither of them, was thrust silently but swiftly forward, and grasped the precious instrument. A fierce exclamation from Mr. Malvern, as he started from his seat, and a convulsive scream from Mrs. Williams as she fell back in hers, followed; and to add to the animation of

the tableau, my friend in the opposite wing emerged at the same moment from his hiding-place.

Mr. Malvern comprehended at a glance the situation of affairs, and made a furious dash at the paper. I was quicker as well as stronger than he, and he failed in his object. Resistance was of course out of the question ; and in less than two hours we were speeding on the rail towards London, accompanied by the child, whom we intrusted to Williams's servant maid.

Mr. Repton was still in town, and Mrs. Ashton, Lady Redwood, and her unmarried sister, in their impatience of intelligence, had arrived several days before. I had the pleasure of accompanying Mrs. Repton with the child and his temporary nurse to Osborne's Hotel in the Adelphi ; and I really at first feared for the excited mother's reason, or that she would do the infant a mischief, so tumultuous, so frenzied, was her rapturous joy at the recovery of her lost treasure. When placed in the cot beside the female infant, the resemblance of the one to the other was certainly almost perfect. I never saw before nor since so complete a likeness. This was enough for the mother ; but fortunately we had much more satisfactory evidence, legally viewed, to establish the identity of the child in a court of law, should the necessity arise for doing so.

Here, as far as I am concerned, all positive knowledge of this curious piece of family history ends. Of subsequent transactions between the parties I had no personal cognisance. I only know there was a failure of justice, and I can pretty well guess from what motives. The parties I arrested in Birmingham were kept in strict custody for several days ; but no inducement, no threats, could induce the institutors of the inquiry to appear against the detected criminals.

Mrs. and Miss Ashton, Lady Redwood and her children, left town the next day but one for Redwood Manor ; and Mr. Repton coolly told the angry superintendent that " he had no instructions to prosecute." He, too, was speedily off, and the prisoners were necessarily discharged out of custody.

I saw, about three weeks afterwards, in a morning paper, that Mr. Malvern, "whom the birth of a posthumous heir in a direct line had necessarily deprived of all chances of succession to the Redwood estates, and the baronetcy, which the newspapers had



so absurdly conferred on him, was, with his amiable lady and family, about to leave England for Italy, where they intended to remain for some time." The expressed but uncompleted will of the deceased baronet, Sir Thomas Redwood, had been, it was further stated, carried into effect, and the legacy intended for Mr. Malvern paid over to him. The Williamses never, to my knowledge, attained to the dignity of a notice in the newspapers, but I believe they pursued their original intention of passing over to America.

Thus not only "Offence's gilded hand," but some of the best feelings of our nature, not unfrequently "shove by justice," and place a concealing gloss over deeds which, in other circumstances, would have infallibly consigned the perpetrators to a prison, or perhaps the hulks. Whether, however, any enactment could effectually grapple with an abuse which springs from motives so natural and amiable, is a question which I must leave to wiser heads than mine to discuss and determine.



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE PURSUIT.

THE reader need scarcely be told that albeit police-officers, like other men, chiefly delight to recount their *successful* exploits, they do, nevertheless, experience numerous and vexatious failures and disappointments. One especially I remember, of which the irritating recollection did not pass away for many weeks. I had been for some time in pursuit of a rather eminent rascal, though one young in years, and by marriage respectably connected, who by an infamous abuse of the trust reposed in him by the highly respectable firm who employed him, had contrived to possess himself of a large sum of money, with which, or at least with the portion of it falling to his share—for we discovered that he had been for some time connected with a gang of first-rate swindlers—he hoped to escape to America. The chase was hot after him ; and spite of all his doublings and turnings, and the false scents adroitly thrown out by his confederates with the view to favour his escape, I at last fairly ran him to earth at Plymouth, though in what precise spot of it he burrowed I could not for the moment ascertain. Neither was I well acquainted with his features ; but in the description of his person furnished me there were certain indelible marks enumerated which, upon strict examination, could not fail to determine his identity. He purposed, I ascertained, to attempt leaving England in a barque bound for New York, which was to sail from Plymouth on the day after I arrived there. Of this I was fully satisfied, and I determined to capture him on board. Accordingly, about half an hour before the ship was to sail, and after all the passengers had embarked, two of the local officers and I got into a boat which I had some time previously engaged

to be in readiness, and put off to the vessel. The wind was decidedly fair for the emigrant-ship: and so stiffly did it blow from the north-east, that four hands, I was informed, were required, not indeed to convey us swiftly out, but to pull the boat back against the wind and the strong tide which would be running outside the breakwater. The sea dashed smartly at times over the boat, and the men pulled their sou'-wester caps well over their eyes, to shield themselves from the blinding spray. We were speedily on board; and the captain, although much annoyed at the delay, paraded his motley passengers as well as crew before us; but to my extreme surprise our bird was not amongst them! Every possible and impossible hiding-place was thoroughly but vainly searched; and we were at length compelled to a reluctant admission that the gentleman we were in quest of had not yet honoured the captain of the *Columbia* with his patronage.

We sullenly returned into the boat; and the instant we did so, the anchor, already atrip, was brought home; the ship's bows fell rapidly off; her crowded canvas dilated and swelled in the spanking breeze, and she sprang swiftly off upon her course. It was a pretty and somewhat exciting spectacle; and I and my companions continued to watch the smartly-handled vessel with much interest till a point of land hid her from our view. We then turned our faces towards Plymouth, from which, I was surprised to find, we were apparently as distant as ever. "The tide, let alone the wind, is dead against us!" growled the master of the boat, who was now pulling the near oar, in reply to a remark from one of the Plymouth officers. This man had steered on going out. A quick suspicion flashed across me. "Where is the other boatman who came out with us?" I sharply demanded. The old seaman, instead of replying, turned himself halfround towards the weather-bow oar, exclaiming, "Easy, Billy—easy; let her nose lay a little closer to the wind!" This, I readily saw, was done to conceal a momentary confusion, arising from the suddenness of my question—a very slight one by-the-by, for the fellow was an old man-of-war's man, with a face hardened and bronzed by service, weather, grog, and tobacco-smoke. I repeated the question in a more peremptory tone. The veteran first deliberately squirted a mouthful of

tobacco-juice over the side, and then, with an expression of his cast-iron phiz, which it is impossible by words to convey a distinct idea of, so compounded was it of diabolical squint, lamb-like simplicity, and impudent cunning, replied, "That wor a passenger to Yankee Land—a goin' there, I'm purty suspicious, for the benefit of his health." I looked at the Plymouth officers and they at me. The impudent ingenuity of the trick that had been played us seemed scarcely credible. "He—he—ho—ho!" rumbled out of the tobacco-stifled throat of the old rogue. "If he wor somebody you wanted, it wor uncommon well done. Didn't you obsarve him jump into the main chains of the barkey jist as you wor leavin' on her, and cast us off a minute afterwards? He perfarred stoppin with us whilst you wor rummagin' the hooker—he—he—ho—ho!"

It was useless bandying words with the fellow, and though I felt desperately savage, I had sense enough to hold my tongue. "Pull smartly," said one of the Plymouth officers; "a shot will bring her to yet."

"Why, ay," rejoined the imperturbable seaman; "it mout, if you could get speech of the admiral in time; but I'm thinkin we shall be a good while yet pullin' in against this choppin' wind and head sea."

And sure enough they were! More than another hour, by some boatman-craft unexplainable by me, for the sailors apparently rowed with all their might, were we in reaching the landing-place; but by that time all chance of compelling the return of the *Columbia* was long past.

It would be, I knew, impossible to *prove* complicity on the part of the owner of the boat with the escaped felon, and I preferred to digest the venom of my spleen in silence, rather than by a useless display of it to add to the chuckling delight of the old rascal of a boatman.

We had passed some distance along the quay when one of the local officers, addressing a youngish sailor, who, with folded arms and a short pipe in his mouth, was standing in philosophical contemplation of the sea and weather, said, "I suppose there is no chance of the emigrant ship that sailed awhile ago putting in at any other port along the coast?"

The man took the pipe from his mouth, regarded the ques-

tioner for a few moments with an expression of contemptuous curiosity anything but flattering to its object, and bawled out, addressing himself to a weather-beaten seaman a few yards off, "I say, Tom Davis, here's a Blue Bottle as wants to know the name and bearin's of the port off the Land's End which the barkey that sailed awhile ago for Ameriker, with a north-easter kicking her endways, is likely to bring up in: I'm not acquainted with it myself, or else I'd tell the gentleman."

The laugh from two or three bystanders which followed this sally greatly irritated the officer, and he would have indulged in an angry reply had not his more prudent comrade taken him by the arm and urged him away.

"Ay, ay," said the veteran addressed as Tom Davis, as we were passing him, "Jim there has always got plenty of jawing tackle aboard; but, Lord love ye, he's a poor dumb cretur at understanding the signs of the weather! He's talkin' about north-easters, and don't see that the wind's beginning to chop about like a bumboat woman with a dozen customers round her. It's my opinion, and Tom Davis ought by this time to be sommut of a judge, that, instead of a north-easter, it's a precious sight more likely to be blowing a sou'-wester before two hours are past, and a sneezer, too; and then the *Columby*, if she han't made a good offin', which she is not likely to have done, will be back again in a brace of shakes."

"Do you think it probable," I eagerly asked, "that the *Columbia* will be obliged to put back into Plymouth?"

"I don't know about *probable*. It's not so sure as death or quarter-day, but it's upon the cards, for all that."

"Will it be early in the night, think you, that she will run in, if at all?"

"Ah, there now you wants to know too much," said the old seaman turning on his heel. "All I can say is, that if you find in an hour or so's time that the wind has chopped round to the sou'-west, or within a p'int or two, and that it's blowin' the buttons off your coat one after another, the *Columby*, if she's lucky, won't be far off."

The half-bantering prediction of the old seaman was confirmed by others whom we consulted, and measures for preventing our quarry from landing, and again giving us the slip, were at once

discussed and resolved upon. We then separated, and I proceeded to the tavern at which I had put up to get some dinner. I had not gone far when my eye fell upon two persons whose presence there surprised as well as somewhat grieved me. One was the young wife of the criminal on board the *Columbia*. I had seen her once in London, and I knew, as before intimated, that she was of respectable parentage. There was no exultation in her countenance. She had no doubt followed or accompanied her husband to Plymouth for the purpose of furthering his escape, and now feared that the capricious elements would render all the ingenuity and boldness that had been brought into play vain and profitless. She was a mild-looking, pretty woman—very much so, I doubt not, till trouble fell upon her, and wonderfully resembled the female in the “Momentous Question;” so remarkably, indeed, that when, years afterwards, I first saw that print, I felt an instantaneous conviction that I had somewhere met with the original of the portrait; and after much puzzlement of brain remembered when and where. The resemblance was doubtless purely accidental; but it was not the less extraordinary and complete. She was accompanied by a gray-haired man, of grave, respectable exterior, whom I at once concluded to be her father. As I passed close by them, he appeared about to address me, and I half paused to hear what he had to say; but his partly-formed purpose was not persisted in, and I proceeded on my way.

After dining, I returned to the quay. The wind, as foretold, was blowing directly from the south-west; and during the short space of time I had been absent, had increased to a tempest. The wild sea was dashing with terrific violence against the breakwater, discernible only in the fast-darkening night by a line of white, tumultuous foam and spray, which leaped and hissed against and over it.

“A dirty night coming on,” said a subaltern officer of the port whom I had previously spoken with; “the *Columbia* will, I think, be pretty sure to run in with the tide.”

“When do you say is the very earliest time she may be expected?”

“Well, in my opinion, judging from where she was when I was on the look-out a quarter of an hour ago, not under three

hours. Let me see. It's now just upon the stroke of five : about eight o'clock, I should say, she will be here ; certainly not before ; perhaps much later ; and if the captain is very obstinate, and prefers incurring a rather serious risk to returning, it may be of course not at all."

I thanked him, and as remaining on the bleak quay till eight o'clock or thereabout was as useless as unpleasant, I retraced my steps towards the Royal George Tavern, calling in my way on the Plymouth officers, and arranging that one of them should relieve me at ten o'clock ; it having been previously agreed that we should keep an alternate watch during the night of two hours each. I afterwards remembered that this arrangement was repeated, in a tone of voice incautiously loud, at the bar of a public-house, where they insisted on my taking a glass of porter. There were, I should say, more than a dozen persons present at the time.

The fire was blazing brightly in the parlour of the Royal George when I entered and I had not been seated near it many minutes before I became exceedingly drowsy ; and no wonder, for I had not been in bed the previous night, and the blowing of the wind in my eyes for a couple of hours had of course added greatly to their heavy weariness. Habit had long enabled me to awake at any moment I had previously determined on, so that I felt no anxiety as to over-sleeping myself ; and having pulled out my watch, noticed that it was barely half-past five, wound it up, and placed it before me on the table, I settled myself comfortably in an arm-chair, and was soon sound asleep.

I awoke with a confused impression, not only that I had quite slept the time I had allotted myself, but that strangers were in the room and standing about me. I was mistaken in both particulars. There was no one in the parlour but myself, and on glancing at the watch I saw that it was but a quarter-past six. I rose from the chair, stirred the fire, took two or three turns about the room, listened for a few minutes to the howling wind and driving rain which shook and beat against the casement, sat down again, and took up a newspaper which was lying on the table.

I had read for some time when the parlour door opened, and who should walk in but the young wife and elderly gentleman

whom I had seen in the street. I at once concluded that they had sought me with reference to the fugitive on board the *Columbia* : and the venerable old man's rather elaborate apologies for intrusion over, and both of them seated on the side of the fireplace opposite to me, I waited with grave curiosity to hear what they might have to say.

An awkward silence ensued. The young woman's eyes, swollen with weeping, were bent upon the floor, and her entire aspect and demeanour exhibited extreme sorrow and dejection. I pitied her, so sad and gentle did she look, from my very soul. The old man appeared anxious and careworn, and for some time remained abstractedly gazing at the fire without speaking. I had a mind to avoid a painful, and, I was satisfied, profitless interview, by abruptly retiring; and was just rising for the purpose when a fiercer tempest-blast than before, accompanied by the pattering of heavy rain-drops against the window-panes, caused me to hesitate at exposing myself unnecessarily to the rigour of such a night; and at the same moment the gray-haired man suddenly raised his eyes and regarded me with a fixed and grave scrutiny.

"This war of the elements," he at last said, "this wild uproar of physical nature, is but a type, Mr. Waters, and a faint one, of the convulsions, the antagonisms, the hurtful conflicts ever raging in the moral world."

I bowed dubious assent to a proposition not apparently very pertinent to the subject which I supposed chiefly occupied his mind, and he proceeded.

"It is difficult for dim-eyed beings such as we are always to trace the guiding-hand of the ever-watchful Power which conducts the complex events of this changing, many-coloured life, to wise and foreseen issues. The conflicts of faith with actual experience are hard for poor humanity to bear, and still keep unimpaired the jewel beyond price of unwavering trust in Him to whom the secrets of all hearts are known. Ah, sir! guilt, flaunting its vanities in high places—innocence in danger of fetters—are perplexing subjects to dwell upon!"

I was somewhat puzzled by this strange talk; but, hopeful that a meaning would presently appear, I again silently intimated partial concurrence in his general views.



"There is no longer much doubt, Mr. Waters, I believe," he after a few moments added in a much more business-like and sensible tone, "that the *Columbia* will be forced back again, and that the husband of this unhappy girl will consequently fall into the hands of the blind, unreasoning law. You appear surprised.

My name, I should have mentioned, is Thompson; and be assured, Mr. Waters, that when the real facts of this most unfortunate affair are brought to your knowledge, no one will more bitterly regret than yourself that this tempest and sudden change of wind should have flung back the prey both you and I believed had escaped upon these fatal shores."

"From your name, I presume you to be the father of this young woman, and"—

"Yes," he interrupted; "and the father-in-law of the innocent man you have hunted down with such untiring activity and zeal. But I blame you not," he added, checking himself—"I blame you not. You have only done what you held to be your duty. But the ways of Providence are indeed inscrutable."

A passionate burst of grief from the pale, weeping wife testified that, whatever might be the fugitive husband's offences or crimes against society, he at least retained *her* affection and esteem.

"It is very unpleasant," I observed, "to discuss such a subject in the presence of relatives of the inculpatated person, especially as I as yet perceive no useful result likely to arise from it; still, since you, as it were, force me to speak, you must permit me to say, that it appears to me you are either grossly deceived yourself, or attempting for some purpose or other to impose upon my credulity."

"Neither, sir—neither," replied Mr. Thompson with warmth. "I certainly am not deceived myself, and I should hope that my character, which I doubt not is well known to you, will shield me from any suspicion of a desire to deceive others."

"I am quite aware, Mr. Thompson, of your personal respectability; still you may be unwittingly led astray. I very much regret to say, that the evidence against your daughter's husband is overwhelming and, I fear, unanswerable."

"The best, kindest of husbands!" broke in the sobbing wife ;  
"the most injured, the most persecuted of men!"

"It is useless," said I, rising and seizing my hat, "to prolong this conversation. If he be innocent, he will no doubt be acquitted ; but as it is now close upon half-past seven o'clock, I must beg to take my leave."

"One moment, sir," said Mr. Thompson, hastily. "To be frank with you, it was entirely for the purpose of asking your advice, as an experienced person, that we are here. You have heard of this young man's father?"

"Joel Masters? Yes. A gambler, and otherwise disreputable person, and one of the most specious rascals, I am told, under the sun."

"You have correctly described him. You are not perhaps acquainted with his handwriting?"

"Yes, I am ; partially so at least. I have a note in my pocket—here it is—addressed to me by the artful old scoundrel for the purpose of luring me from the right track after his son."

"Then, Mr. Waters, please to read this letter from him, dated Liverpool, where it appears he was yesterday to embark for America."

The letter Mr. Thompson placed in my hands startled me not a little. It was a circumstantial confession addressed by Joel Masters to his son, setting forth that he, the father, was alone guilty of the offence with which his unfortunate son was charged, and authorizing him to make a full disclosure should he fail in making his escape from the country. This was, I thought, an exceedingly cheap kind of generosity on the part of honest Joel, now that he had secured himself by flight from the penalties of justice. The letter went on to state where a large amount of bank-notes and acceptances, which the writer had been unable to change or discount, would be found.

"This letter," said I, "is a very important one ; but where is the envelope?"

Mr. Thompson searched his pocket-book ; it was not there. "I must have dropped it," he exclaimed, "at my lodgings. Pray wait till I return. I am extremely anxious to convince you of this unfortunate young man's innocence. I will not be more than a few minutes absent." He then hurried out.

I looked at my watch ; it wanted five-and-twenty minutes to eight. " I have but a very few minutes to spare," I observed to the still passionately-grieving wife ; " and as to the letter, you had better place it in the hands of the attorney for the defence."

" Ah, sir," sobbed the wife, raising her timid eyes towards me, " you do not believe us, or you would not be so eager to seize my husband."

" Pardon me," I replied, " I have no right to doubt the truth of what you have told me ; but my duty is a plain one, and must be performed."

" Tell me frankly, honestly," cried the half-frantic woman, with renewed burst of tears, " if, in your opinion, this evidence will save my unhappy, deeply-injured husband ? My father, I fear, deceives me—deceives himself with a vain hope."

I hesitated to express a very favourable opinion of the effect of a statement, obnoxious, as a few moments' reflection suggested, to so much suspicion. The wife quickly interpreted the meaning of my silence, and broke at once into a flood of hysterical lamentation. It was with the greatest difficulty I kept life in her by copious showers of water from the decanter that stood on the table. This endured some time. At last I said abruptly, for my watch admonished me that full ten minutes had been passed in this way, that I must summon the waiter and leave her.

" Go—go," said she, suddenly rallying, " since it must be so. I—I will follow."

I immediately left the house, hastened to the quay, and, on arriving there, strained my eyes seaward in search of the expected ship. A large bark, which very much resembled her, was, to my dismay, riding at anchor within the breakwater, her sails furled, and everything made snug for the night. I ran to the landing steps, near which two or three sailors were standing.

" What vessel is that ? " I asked, pointing to the one which had excited my alarm.

" *The Columbia*," replied the man.

" *The Columbia* ! Why, when did she arrive ? "

" Some time ago. The clock chimed a quarter past eight as the captain and a few of the passengers came on shore."

"A quarter past eight! Why, it wants nearly half an hour to that now!"

"Does it though? Before you are ten minutes older you'll hear the clock strike nine!"

The man's words were followed by a merry mocking laugh close to my elbow: I turned sharply round, and for the first and last time in my life I felt an almost irresistible temptation to strike a woman. There stood the meek, dove-eyed, grief-stricken wife, I had parted from but a few minutes before, gazing with brazen impudence in my face.

"Perhaps, Mr. Waters," said she, with another taunting laugh, "perhaps yours is London time; or, which is probably more likely, watches sometimes sleep for an hour or so as well as their owners." She then skipped gaily off.

"Are you a Mr. Waters?" said a custom-house official who was parading the quay.

"Yes—and what then?"

"Only that a Mr. Joel Masters desired me to say that he was very much grieved he could not return to finish the evening with you, as he and his son were unfortunately obliged to leave Plymouth immediately."

It would have been a real pleasure to have flung the speaker over the quay. By a great effort I denied myself the tempting luxury, and walked away in a fever of rage. Neither Joel Masters nor his son could afterwards be found, spite of the unremitting efforts of myself and others, continued through several weeks. They both ultimately escaped to America; and some years afterwards I learned through an unexpected channel that the canting, specious old rascal was at length getting his deserts in the establishment of Sing-Sing. The son, the same informant assured me, had, through the persuasions and influence of his wife, who probably thought justice might not be so pleasantly eluded another time, turned over a new leaf, and was leading an honest and prosperous life at Cincinnati.

## CHAPTER VII.

## LEGAL METAMORPHOSES.

THE respectable agent of a rather eminent French house arrived one morning in great apparent distress at Scotland Yard, and informed the superintendent that he had just sustained a great, almost ruinous, loss in notes of the Bank of England and commercial bills of exchange, besides a considerable sum in gold. He had, it appeared, been absent in Paris about ten days, and on his return but a few hours previously, discovered that his iron chest had been completely rifled during his absence. False keys must have been used, as the empty chest was found locked, and no sign of violence could be observed. He handed in full written details of the property carried off, the numbers of the notes, and every other essential particular. The first step taken was to ascertain if any of the notes had been tendered at the bank. Not one had been presented; payment was of course stopped, and advertisements descriptive of the bills of exchange, as well as of the notes, were inserted in the evening and following morning papers. A day or two afterwards, a considerable reward was offered for such information as might lead to the apprehension of the offenders. No result followed; and spite of the active exertions of the officers employed, not the slightest clue could be obtained to the perpetrators of the robbery. The junior partner in the firm, M. Bellebon, in the meantime arrived in England, to assist in the investigation, and was naturally extremely urgent in his inquiries: but the mystery which enveloped the affair remained impenetrable. At last a letter, bearing the St. Martin-le-Grand post-mark, was received by the agent, M. Alexandre le Breton, which contained an offer to surrender the whole of the plunder, with the exception of the gold,

for the sum of one thousand pounds. The property which had been abstracted was more than ten times that sum, and had been destined by the French house to meet some heavy liabilities falling due in London very shortly. Le Breton had been ordered to pay the whole amount into Hoare's, to the account of the firm, and had indeed been severely blamed for not having done so as he received the different notes and bills; and it was on going to the chest immediately on his return from Paris, for the purpose of fulfilling the peremptory instructions he had received, that M. le Breton discovered the robbery.

The letter went on to state that should the offer be acceded to, a mystically-worded advertisement—of which a copy was enclosed—was to be inserted in the “Times,” and then a mode would be suggested for safely—in the interest of the thieves of course—carrying the agreement into effect. M. Bellebon was half-inclined to close with this proposal, in order to save the credit of the house, which would be destroyed unless its acceptances, now due in about fourteen days, could be met; and without the stolen monies and bills of exchange, this was, he feared, impossible. The superintendent, to whom M. Bellebon showed the letter, would not hear of compliance with such a demand, and threatened a prosecution for composition of felony if M. Bellebon persisted in doing so. The advertisement was, however, inserted, and an immediate reply directed that Le Breton, the agent, should present himself at the Old Manor House, Green Lanes, Newington, unattended, at four o'clock on the following afternoon, bringing with him of course the stipulated sum *in gold*. It was added that, to prevent any possible treason (*trahison*—the letter was written in French), Le Breton would find a note for him at the tavern, informing him of the spot—a solitary one and far away from any place where an ambush could be concealed—where the business would be concluded, and to which he must proceed unaccompanied, and on foot! This proposal was certainly quite as ingenious as it was cool, and the chance of outwitting such cunning rascals seemed exceedingly doubtful. A very tolerable scheme was, however, hit upon, and M. le Breton proceeded at the appointed hour to the Old Manor House. No letter or message had been left for him, and nobody obnoxious to the

slightest suspicion could be seen near or about the tavern. On the following day another missive arrived, which stated that the writer was quite aware of the trick which the police had intended playing him, and he assured M. Bellebon that such a line of conduct was as unwise as it would be fruitless, inasmuch as if "good faith" was not observed, the securities and notes would be inexorably destroyed or otherwise disposed of, and the house of Bellebon and Company would be consequently exposed to the shame and ruin of bankruptcy.

Just at this crisis of the affair I arrived in town from my unsuccessful hunt after the fugitives who had slipped through my fingers at Plymouth. The superintendent laughed heartily, not so much at the trick by which I had been duped, as at the angry mortification I did not affect to conceal. He presently added, "I have been wishing for your return, in order to entrust you with a tangled affair, in which success will amply compensate for such a disappointment. You know French, too, which is fortunate; for the gentleman who has been plundered understands little or no English." He then related the foregoing particulars, with other apparently slight circumstances; and after a long conversation with him, I retired to think the matter over, and decide upon the likeliest mode of action. After much cogitation, I determined to see M. Bellebon *alone*; and for this purpose I despatched the waiter of a tavern adjacent to his lodgings, with a note expressive of my wish to see him instantly on pressing business. He was at home, and immediately acceded to my request. I easily introduced myself; and after about a quarter of an hour's conference, said carelessly—for I saw he was too heedless of speech, too quick and frank, to be intrusted with the dim suspicions which certain trifling indices had suggested to me—"Is Monsieur le Breton at the office where the robbery was committed?"

"No; he is gone to Greenwich on business, and will not return till late in the evening. But if you wish to re-examine the place, I can of course enable you to do so."

"It will, I think, be advisable; and you will, if you please," I added, as we emerged into the street, "permit me to take you by the arm, in order that the *official* character of my visit may not be suspected by any one there."

He laughingly complied, and we arrived at the house arm in arm. We were admitted by an elderly woman; and there was a young man—a moustached clerk—seated at a desk in an inner room writing. He eyed me for a moment, somewhat askance I thought, but I gave him no opportunity for a distinct view of my features; and I presently handed M. Bellebon a card, on which I had contrived to write, unobserved, “send away the clerk.” This was more naturally done than I anticipated; and in answer to M. Bellebon’s glance of inquiry, I merely said, “That as I did not wish to be known there as a police-officer, it was essential that the minute search I was about to make should be without witnesses.” He agreed; and the woman was also sent away upon a distant errand. Every conceivable place did I ransack; every scrap of paper that had writing on it I eagerly perused. At length the search was over, apparently without result.

“You are quite sure, Monsieur Bellebon, as you informed the superintendent, that Monsieur le Breton has no female relations or acquaintances in this country?”

“Positive,” he replied. “I have made the most explicit inquiries on the subject both of the clerk Dubarle and of the woman-servant.”

Just then the clerk returned, out of breath with haste I noticed, and I took my leave without even now affording the young gentleman so clear a view of my face as he was evidently anxious to obtain.

“No female acquaintance!” thought I, as I re-entered the private room of the tavern I had left an hour before. “From whom came, then, these scraps of perfumed note-paper I have found in his desk, I wonder?” I sat down and endeavoured to piece them out, but after considerable trouble, satisfied myself that they were parts of different notes, and so small, unfortunately, as to contain nothing which separately afforded any information except that they were all written by one hand, and that a female one.

About two hours after this I was sauntering along in the direction of Stoke-Newington, where I was desirous of making some inquiries as to another matter, and had passed the Kingsland Gate a few hundred yards, when a small discoloured



printed handbill, lying in a haberdasher's shop window, arrested my attention. It ran thus :—"Two guineas reward—Lost, an Italian greyhound. The tip of its tail has been chopped off, and it answers to the name of Fidèle." Underneath, the reader was told to "inquire within."

"Fidèle!" I mentally exclaimed. "Any relation to M. le Breton's fair correspondent's Fidèle, I wonder?" In a twinkling my pocket-book was out, and I reperused by the gas-light on one of the perfumed scraps of paper the following portion of a sentence, "*ma pauvre Fidèle est per*"——. The bill, I observed, was dated nearly three weeks previously. I forthwith entered the shop, and pointing to the bill, said I knew a person who had found such a dog as was there advertised for. The woman at the counter said she was glad to hear it, as the lady, formerly a customer of theirs, was much grieved at the animal's loss.

"What is the lady's name?" I asked.

"I can't rightly pronounce the name," was the reply. "It is French, I believe; but here it is, with the address, in the day-book, written by herself."

I eagerly read—"Madame Levasseur, Oak Cottage; about one mile on the road from Edmonton to Southgate." The handwriting greatly resembled that on the scraps I had taken from M. le Breton's desk; and the writer was French too! Here were indications of a trail which might lead to unhopèd-for success, and I determined to follow it up vigorously. After one or two other questions, I left the shop, promising to send the dog to the lady the next day. My business at Stoke-Newington was soon accomplished. I then hastened westward to the establishment of a well-known dog-fancier, and procured the loan, at a reasonable price, of an ugly Italian hound: the requisite loss of the tip of its tail was very speedily accomplished, and so quickly healed, that the newness of the excision could not be suspected. I arrived at the lady's residence about twelve o'clock on the following day, so thoroughly disguised as a vagabond Cockney dog-stealer, that my own wife, when I entered the breakfast parlour just previous to starting, screamed with alarm and surprise. The mistress of Oak Cottage was at home, but indisposed, and the servant said she would take the dog to her, though, if I would take it out of the basket, she herself could

tell me if it was Fidèle or not. I replied that I would only show the dog to the lady, and would not trust it out of my hands. This message was carried up-stairs, and after waiting some time outside—for the woman, with natural precaution, considering my appearance, for the sake of the portable articles lying about, had closed the street-door in my face—I was readmitted, desired to wipe my shoes carefully, and walk up. Madame Levasseur, a showy-looking woman, though not over-refined in speech or manners, was seated on a sofa, in vehement expectation of embracing her dear Fidèle; but my vagabond appearance so startled her, that she screamed loudly for her husband, M. Levasseur. This gentleman, a fine, tall, whiskered, moustached person, hastened into the apartment half-shaved, and with his razor in his hand.

“Qu'est ce qu'il y a donc?” he demanded.

“Mais voyez cette horreur là,” replied the lady, meaning me, not the dog, which I was slowly emancipating from the basket-kennel. The gentleman laughed; and reassured by the presence of her husband, Madame Levasseur's anxieties concentrated themselves upon the expected Fidèle.

“Mais, mon Dieu!” she exclaimed again, as I displayed the aged beauty I had brought for her inspection, “why, that is not Fidèle!”

“Not, marm?” I answered, with quite innocent surprise. “Vy, ere is her werry tail;” and I held up the mutilated extremity for her closer inspection. The lady was not, however, to be convinced even by that evidence; and as the gentleman soon became impatient of my persistence, and hinted very intelligibly that he had a mind to hasten my passage down-stairs with the toe of his boot, I, having made the best possible use of my eyes during the short interview, scrambled up the dog and basket, and departed.

“No female relative or acquaintance, hasn't he?” was my exulting thought, as I gained the road. “And yet if that is not M. le Breton's picture between those of the husband and wife, I am a booby, and a blind one.” I no longer in the least doubted that I had struck a brilliant trail; and I could have shouted with exultation, so eager was I not only to retrieve my, as I fancied, somewhat tarnished reputation for activity and skill,

but to extricate the plundered firm from their terrible difficulties; the more especially as young M. Bellebon, with the frankness of his age and nation, had hinted to me—and the suddenly tremulous light of his fine expressive eyes testified to the acuteness of his apprehensions—that his marriage with a long-loved and amiable girl depended upon his success in saving the credit of his house.

That same evening, about nine o'clock, M. Levasseur, expensively, but withal snobbishly attired, left Oak Cottage, walked to Edmonton, hailed a cab, and drove off rapidly towards town, followed by an English swell as stylishly and snobbishly dressed, wigged, whiskered, and moustached as himself: this English swell being no other than myself, as prettily metamorphosed and made up for the part I intended playing as heart could wish.

M. Levasseur descended at the end of the Quadrant, Regent Street, and took his way to Vine Street, leading out of that celebrated thoroughfare. I followed; and observing him enter a public-house, unhesitatingly did the same. It was a house of call and general rendezvous for foreign servants out of place. Valets, couriers, cooks, of many varieties of shade, nation, and respectability, were assembled there, smoking, drinking, and playing at an insufferably noisy game, unknown, I believe, to Englishmen, and which must, I think, have been invented in sheer despair of cards, dice, or other implements of gambling. The sole instruments of play were the gamesters' fingers, of which the two persons playing suddenly and simultaneously uplifted as many, or as few, as they pleased, each player alternately calling a number; and if he named precisely how many fingers were held up by himself and opponent, he marked a point. The hubbub of cries—"cinq," "neuf," "dix," &c.—was deafening. The players, almost everybody in the large room—were too much occupied to notice our entrance; and M. Levasseur and myself seated ourselves, and called for something to drink, without, I was glad to see, exciting the slightest observation. M. Levasseur, I soon perceived, was an intimate acquaintance of many there: and somewhat to my surprise, for he spoke French very well, I found that he was a Swiss. His name was, I therefore concluded, assumed. Nothing positive rewarded

my watchfulness that evening ; but I felt quite sure Levasseur had come there with the expectation of meeting some one, as he did not play, and went away about half-past eleven o'clock with an obviously discontented air. The following night it was the same ; but the next, who should peer into the room about half-past ten, and look cautiously round, but M. Alexandre le Breton ! The instant the eyes of the friends met, Levasseur rose and went out. I hesitated to follow, lest such a movement might excite suspicion ; and it was well I did not, as they both presently returned, and seated themselves close by my side. The anxious, haggard countenance of Le Breton—who had, I should have before stated, been privately pointed out to me by one of the force early on the morning I visited Oak Cottage—struck me forcibly, especially in contrast with that of Levasseur, which wore only an expression of malignant and ferocious triumph, slightly dashed by temporary disappointment. Le Breton stayed but a short time ; and the only whispered words I caught were—“He has, I fear, some suspicion.”

The anxiety and impatience of M. Bellebon whilst this was going on became extreme, and he sent me note after note—the only mode of communication I would permit—expressive of his consternation at the near approach of the time when the engagements of his house would arrive at maturity, without anything having in the meantime been accomplished. I pitied him greatly, and after some thought and hesitation, resolved upon a new and bolder game. By affecting to drink a great deal, occasionally playing, and in other ways exhibiting a reckless, devil-may-care demeanour, I had striven to insinuate myself into the confidence and companionship of Levasseur, but hitherto without much effect ; and although once I could see, startled by a casual hint I dropped to another person—one of ours—just sufficiently loud for him to hear—that I knew a sure and safe market for stopped Bank-of-England notes, the cautious scoundrel quickly subsided into his usual guarded reserve. He evidently doubted me, and it was imperatively necessary to remove those doubts. This was at last effectually, and, I am vain enough to think, cleverly done. One evening a rakish-looking man, who ostentatiously and repeatedly declared himself to be Mr. Trelawny, of Conduit Street, and who was evidently three parts intoxicated, seated

himself directly in front of us, and with much braggart impudence boasted of his money, at the same time displaying a pocket-book, which seemed pretty full of Bank-of-England notes. There were only a few persons present in the room besides us, and they were at the other end of the room. Levasseur, I saw, noticed with considerable interest the look of greed and covetousness which I fixed on that same pocket-book. At length the stranger rose to depart. I also hurried up and slipped after him, and was quietly and slyly followed by Levasseur. After proceeding about a dozen paces I looked furtively about, but *not* behind; robbed Mr. Trelawny of his pocket-book, which he had placed in one of the tails of his coat; crossed over the street, and walked hurriedly away, still, I could hear, followed by Levasseur. I entered another public-house, strode into an empty back-room, and was just in the act of examining my prize, when I stepped Levasseur. He looked triumphant as Lucifer as he clapped me on the shoulder, and said in a low exulting voice, "I saw that pretty trick, Williams, and can, if I like, transport you!"

My consternation was naturally extreme, and Levasseur laughed immensely at the terror he excited. "Soyez tranquille," he said at last, at the same time ringing the bell: "I shall not hurt you." He ordered some wine, and after the waiter had fulfilled the order and left the room, said, "Those notes of Mr. Trelawny's will of course be stopped in the morning, but I think I once heard you say you knew of a market for such articles?"

I hesitated, coyly unwilling to further commit myself. "Come, come," resumed Levasseur, in a still low but menacing tone, "no nonsense. I have you now; you are, in fact, entirely in my power: but be candid, and you are safe. Who is your friend?"

"He is not in town now," I stammered.

"Stuff—humbug! I have myself some notes to change. There, now we understand each other. What does he give, and how does he dispose of them?"

"He gives about a third generally, and gets rid of them abroad. They reach the bank through *bonâ fide* and innocent holders, and in that case the Bank is of course bound to pay."

"Is that the law also with respect to bills of exchange?"

"Yes, to be sure it is."

"And is *amount* of any consequence to your friend?"

"None, I believe, whatever."

"Well, then, you must introduce me to him."

"No, that I can't," I hurriedly answered. "He won't deal with strangers?"

"You *must*, I tell you, or I will call an officer." Terrified by this threat, I muttered that his name was Levi Samuel.

"And where does Levi Samuel live?"

"That," I replied, "I *cannot* tell; but I know how to communicate with him."

Finally, it was settled by Levasseur that I should dine at Oak Cottage the next day but one, and that I should arrange with Samuel to meet us there immediately afterwards. The notes and bills he had to dispose of, I was to inform Samuel, amounted to nearly twelve thousand pounds, and I was promised £500 for effecting the bargain.

"Five hundred pounds, remember, Williams," said Levasseur as we parted; "or, if you deceive me, transportation! You can prove nothing regarding *me*, whereas I could settle you off hand."

The superintendent and I had a long and rather anxious conference the next day. We agreed that, situate as Oak Cottage was, in an open space away from any other building, it would not be advisable that any officer except myself and the pretended Samuel should approach the place. We also agreed as to the probability of such clever rogues having so placed the notes and bills that they could be consumed or otherwise destroyed on the slightest alarm, and that the open arrest of Levasseur, and a search of Oak Cottage, would in all likelihood prove fruitless. "There will be only two of them," I said, in reply to a remark of the superintendent as to the somewhat dangerous game I was risking with powerful and desperate men, "even should Le Breton be there; and surely Jackson and I, aided by the surprise and our pistols, will be too many for them." Little more was said, the superintendent wished us luck, and I sought out and instructed Jackson.

I will confess that, on setting out the next day to keep my appointment, I felt considerable anxiety. Levasseur *might* have

discovered my vocation, and set this trap for my destruction. Yet that was hardly possible. At all events, whatever the danger, it was necessary to face it; and having cleaned and loaded my pistols with unusual care, and bade my wife a more than usually earnest farewell, which, by the way, rather startled her, I set off, determined, as we used to say in Yorkshire, "to win the horse or lose the saddle."

I arrived in good time at Oak Cottage, and found my host in the highest possible spirits. Dinner was ready, he said, but it would be necessary to wait a few minutes for the two friends he expected.

"Two friends!" I exclaimed, really startled. "You told me last evening there was to be only one, a Monsieur Le Breton."

"True," rejoined Levasseur carelessly; "but I had forgotten that another party as much interested as ourselves would like to be present, and invite himself, if I did not. But there will be enough for us all, never fear," he added, with a coarse laugh, "especially as Madame Levasseur does not dine with us."

At this moment a loud knock was heard. "Here they are," exclaimed Levasseur, and hastened out to meet them. I peeped through the blind, and to my great alarm saw that Le Breton was accompanied by the clerk Dubarle! My first impulse was to seize my pistols and rush out of the house; but calmer thoughts soon succeeded, and the probability that a plan had been laid to entrap me recurred forcibly. Still, should the clerk recognise me? The situation was undoubtedly a critical one; but I was in for it, and must therefore brave the matter out in the best way I could.

Presently a conversation, carried on in a loud, menacing tone in the next room between Levasseur and the new-comers, arrested my attention, and I softly approached the door to listen. Le Breton, I soon found, was but half a villain, and was extremely anxious that the property should not be disposed of till at least another effort had been made at negotiation. The others, now that a market for the notes and securities had been obtained, were determined to avail themselves of it, and immediately leave the country. The almost agonized entreaties of Le Breton that they would not utterly ruin the house he had betrayed, were treated with scornful contempt, and he was at

length silenced by their brutal menaces. Le Breton, I further learned, was a cousin of Madame Levasseur, whose husband had first pillaged him at play, and then suggested the crime which had been committed as the sole means of concealing the defalcations of which he, Levasseur, had been the occasion and promoter.

After a brief delay, all three entered the dining-room, and a slight but significant start which the clerk Dubarle gave, as Levasseur, with mock ceremony, introduced me, made my heart, as folk say, leap into my mouth. His half-formed suspicions seemed, however, to be dissipated for the moment by the humorous account Levasseur gave him of the robbery of Mr. Trelawny, and we sat down to a very handsome dinner.

A more uncomfortable one, albeit, I never assisted at. The furtive looks of Dubarle, who had been only partially reassured, grew more and more inquisitive and earnest. Fortunately Levasseur was in rollicking spirits and humour, and did not heed the unquiet glances of the young man; and as for Le Breton, he took little notice of anybody. At last this terrible dinner was over, and the wine was pushed briskly round. I drank much more freely than usual, partly with a view to calm my nerves, and partly to avoid remark. It was nearly the time for the Jew's appearance, when Dubarle, after a scrutinizing and somewhat imperious look at my face, said abruptly, "I think, Monsieur Williams, I have seen you somewhere before?"

"Very likely," I replied, with as much indifference as I could assume. "Many persons have seen me before—some of them once or twice too often."

"True!" exclaimed Levasseur with a shout. "Trelawny, for instance!"

"I should like to see monsieur with his wig off!" said the clerk with increasing insolence.

"Nonsense, Dubarle; you are a fool," exclaimed Levasseur, "and I will not have my good friend Williams insulted."

Dubarle did not persist, but it was plain enough that some dim remembrance of my features continued to haunt and perplex him.

At length, and the relief was unspeakable, a knock at the outer door announced Jackson—Levi Samuel I mean. We all jumped up, and ran to the window. It was the Jew sure



enough, and admirably he had dressed and now looked the part Levasseur went out, and in a minute or two returned introducing him. Jackson could not suppress a start as he caught sight of the tall moustached addition to the expected company; and although he turned it off very well, it drove the Jewish dialect in which he had been practising completely out of his thoughts and speech, as he said, "You have more company than my friend Williams led me to expect?"

"A friend—one friend extra, Mr. Samuel," said Levasseur "that is all. Come, sit down, and let me help you to a glass of wine. You are an English Jew, I perceive?"

"Yes."

A silence of a minute or two succeeded, and then Levasseur said, "You are of course prepared for business?"

"Yes—that is, if you are reasonable."

"Reasonable! the most reasonable men in the world," rejoined Levasseur, with a loud laugh. "But pray where is the gold you mean to pay us with?"

"If we agree, I will fetch it in half an hour. I do not carry bags of sovereigns about with me into *all* companies," replied Jackson, with much readiness.

"Well, that's right enough: and how much discount do you charge?"

"I will tell you when I see the securities."

Levasseur rose without another word, and left the apartment. He was gone about ten minutes, and on his return, deliberately counted out the stolen Bank-of-England notes and bills of exchange. Jackson got up from his chair, peered close to them and began noting down the amounts in his pocket-book. He also rose, and pretended to be looking at a picture by the fireplace. The moment was a nervous one, as the signal had been agreed upon, and could not now be changed or deferred. The clerk Dubarle also hastily rose, and eyed Jackson with flaming but indecisive looks. The examination of the securities was at length terminated, and Jackson began counting the Bank-of-England notes aloud—"One—two—three—four—FIVE!" A the signal word passed his lips he threw himself upon L. Breton, who sat next to him; and at the same moment I passed one of my feet between Dubarle's, and with a dextrous twist

hurled him violently on the floor ; another instant and my grasp was on the throat of Levasseur, and my pistol at his ear. "Hurra !" we both shouted with eager excitement ; and before either of the villains could recover from his surprise, or indeed perfectly comprehend what had happened, Levasseur and Le Breton were hand-cuffed, and resistance was out of the question. Young Dubarle was next easily secured.

Levasseur, the instant he recovered the use of his faculties, which the completeness and suddenness of the surprise and attack had paralysed, yelled like a madman with rage and anger, and but for us, would, I verily believe, have dashed his brains out against the walls of the room. The other two were calmer, and having at last thoroughly pinioned and secured them, and carefully gathered up the recovered plunder, we left Oak Cottage in triumph, letting ourselves out, for the woman-servant had gone off, doubtless to acquaint her mistress with the disastrous turn affairs had taken. No inquiry was made after either of them.

An hour afterwards the prisoners were securely locked up, and I hurried to acquaint M. Bellebon with the fortunate issue of our enterprise. His exultation, it will be readily believed, was unbounded ; and I left him busy with letters to the firm, and doubtless one to "*cette chère et amiable Louise*," announcing the joyful news.

The prisoners, after a brief trial, which many readers of this narrative may perhaps remember, were convicted of felonious conspiracy, and were all sentenced to ten years' transportation. Le Breton's sentence, the judge told him, would have been for life, but for the contrition he had exhibited shortly before his apprehension.

As Levasseur passed me on leaving the dock, he exclaimed in French, and in a desperately savage tone, "I will repay you for this when I return, and that infernal Trelawny too." I am too much accustomed to threats of this kind to be in any way moved by them, and I therefore contented myself by smiling, and a civil "*Au revoir—allons !*"

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE REVENGE.

LEVASSEUR and his confederates sailed for the penal settlements in the ill-fated convict-ship, the *Amphytrion*, the total wreck of which on the coast of France, and consequent drowning of the crew and prisoners, excited so painful a sensation in England. A feeling of regret for the untimely fate of Le Breton, whom I regarded rather as a weak dupe than a purposed rascal, passed over my mind as I read the announcement in the newspapers ; but newer events had almost jostled the incidents connected with his name from my remembrance, when a terrible adventure vividly recalled them, and taught me how fierce and untameable are the instincts of hate and revenge in a certain class of minds.

A robbery of plate had been committed in Portman Square with an ingenuity and boldness which left no doubt that it had been effected by clever and practised hands. The detective officers first employed having failed to discover the offenders, the threads of the imperfect and broken clue were placed in my hands, to see if my somewhat renowned dexterity, or luck, as many of my brother-officers preferred calling it, would enable me to piece them out to a satisfactory conclusion. By the description obtained of a man who had been seen lurking about the house a few days previous to the burglary, it had been concluded by my predecessors in the investigation that one Martin, a fellow with half-a-dozen *aliases*, and a well-known traveller on the road to the hulks, was concerned in the affair ; and by their advice a reward of fifty pounds had been offered for his apprehension and conviction. I prosecuted the enquiry with my usual energy and watchfulness, without alighting upon any new fact or intimation of importance. I could not discover that a

single article of the missing property had been either pawned or offered for sale, and little doubt remained that the crucible had fatally diminished the chances of detection. The only hope was, that an increased reward might induce one of the gang to betray his confederates: and as the property was of large value, this was done, and one hundred guineas was promised for the required information. I had been to the printer's to order the placards announcing the increased recompense; and after indulging in a long gossip with the foreman of the establishment, whom I knew well, was passing at about a quarter-past ten o'clock through Ryder's Court, Newport Market, where a tall man met and passed me swiftly, holding a handkerchief to his face. There was nothing remarkable in that, as the weather was bitterly cold and sleety; and I walked unheedingly on. I was just in the act of passing out of the court towards Leicester Square, when swift steps sounded suddenly behind me. I instinctively turned; and as I did so, received a violent blow on the left shoulder—intended, I doubted not, for the nape of my neck—from the tall individual who had passed me a minute previously. As he still held the handkerchief to his face, I did not catch even a momentary glance at his features, and he ran off with surprising speed. The blow, sudden, jarring, and inflicted with a sharp instrument—by a strong knife or a dagger—caused a sensation of faintness; and before I recovered from it all chance of successful pursuit was at an end. The wound, which was not at all serious, I had dressed at a chemist's shop in the Haymarket; and as proclaiming the attack would do nothing towards detecting the perpetrator of it, I said little about it to any one, and managed to conceal it entirely from my wife, to whom it would have suggested a thousand painful apprehensions whenever I happened to be unexpectedly detained from home. The brief glimpse I had of the balked assassin afforded no reasonable indication of his identity. To be sure he ran at an amazing and unusual pace, but this was a qualification possessed by so many of the light-legged as well as light-fingered gentry of my professional acquaintance, that it could not justify even a random suspicion: and I determined to forget the unpleasant incident as soon as possible.

The third evening after this occurrence I was again passing

along Leicester Square at a somewhat late hour, but this time with all my eyes about me. Snow, which the wind blew sharply in one's face, was falling fast, and the cold was intense. Except myself, and a tallish snow-wreathed figure—a woman apparently—not a living being was to be seen. This figure, which was standing still at the farther side of the square, appeared to be awaiting me, and as I drew near it, threw back the hood of a cloak, and to my great surprise disclosed the features of a *Madame Jaubert*. This lady, some years before, had carried on, not very far from the spot where she now stood, a respectable millinery business. She was a widow with one child, a daughter of about seven years of age. *Marie-Louise*, as she was named, was one unfortunate day sent to Coventry Street on an errand with some money in her hand, and never returned. The inquiries set on foot proved utterly without effect: not the slightest intelligence of the fate of the child was obtained—and the grief and distraction of the bereaved mother resulted in temporary insanity. She was confined in a lunatic asylum for seven or eight months, and when pronounced convalescent, found herself homeless, and almost penniless, in the world. This sad story I had heard from one of the keepers of the asylum during her sojourn there. It was a subject she herself never, I was aware, touched upon; and she had no reason to suspect that I was in the slightest degree informed of this melancholy passage in her life. She—why, I know not—changed her name from that of *Duquesne* to the one she now bore—*Jaubert*; and for the last two or three years had supported a precarious existence by plausible begging-letters addressed to persons of credulous benevolence, for which offence she had frequently visited the police-courts at the instance of the secretary of the *Mendicity Society*, and it was there I had consequently made her acquaintance.

“*Madame Jaubert!*” I exclaimed, with unfeigned surprise, “why, what on earth can you be waiting here for on such a night as this?”

“To see you!” was her curt reply.

“To see me! Depend upon it, then, you are knocking at the wrong door for not the first time in your life. The very little faith I ever had in professional widows, with twelve small children, all down with the measles, has long since vanished, and”—

"Nay," she interrupted—she spoke English, by the way, like a native—"I'm not such a fool as to be trying the whimpering dodge upon you. It is a matter of business. You want to find Jem Martin?"

"Ay, truly; but what can *you* know of him? Surely you are not *yet* fallen so low as to be the associate or accomplice of burglars?"

"Neither yet, nor likely to be so," replied the woman; "still, I could tell you where to place your hand on James Martin, if I were but sure of the reward."

"There can be no doubt about that," I answered.

"Then follow me, and before ten minutes are past you will have secured your man."

I did so, cautiously, suspiciously; for my adventure three evenings before had rendered me unusually circumspect and watchful. She led the way to the most crowded quarter of St. Giles's, and when she had reached the entrance of a dark, blind alley, called Hine's Court, turned into it, and beckoned me to follow.

"Nay, nay, Madame Jaubert," I exclaimed, "that won't do. You mean fairly, I dare say; but I don't enter that respectable alley alone at this time of night."

She stopped, silent and embarrassed. Presently she said, with a sneer, "You are afraid, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am."

"What is to be done, then?" she added, after a few moments' consideration. "He is alone, I assure you."

"That is possible; still, I do not enter that *cul-de-sac* to-night unaccompanied save by you."

"You suspect me of some evil design, Mr. Waters?" said the woman, with an accent of reproach. "I thought you might, and yet nothing can be further from the truth. My sole object is to obtain the reward, and escape from this life of misery and degradation to my own country, and if possible begin the world respectably again. Why should you doubt me?"

"How came you acquainted with this robber's haunt?"

"The explanation is easy, but this is not the time for it. Stay, can't you get assistance?"

"Easily—in less than ten minutes; and if you are here when

I return, and your information proves correct, I will ask pardon for my suspicions."

"Be it so," she said joyfully; "and be quick, for this weather is terrible."

Ten minutes had not passed when I returned with half-a-dozen officers, and found Madame Jaubert still at her post. We followed her up the court, caught Martin sure enough, asleep upon a wretched pallet of straw in one of the alley hovels, and walked him off, terribly scared and surprised, to the nearest station-house, where he passed the remainder of the night.

The next day Martin proved an *alibi* of the distinctist, most undeniable kind. He had been an inmate of Clerkenwell prison for the last three months, with the exception of just six days previous to our capture of him; and he was of course at once discharged. The reward was payable only upon conviction of the offender, and the disappointment of poor Madame Jaubert was extreme. She wept bitterly at the thought of being compelled to continue her present disreputable mode of life, when a thousand francs—a sum she believed Martin's capture would have assured her—besides sufficient for her travelling expenses and decent outfit, would, she said, purchase a partnership in a small but respectable millinery shop in Paris. "Well," I remarked to her, "there is no reason for despair. You have not only proved your sincerity and good faith, but that you possess a knowledge—how acquired you best know—of the haunts and hiding-places of burglars. The reward, as you may have seen by the new placards, has been doubled; and I have a strong opinion, from something that has reached me this morning, that if you could light upon one Armstrong, *alias* Rowden, it would be as certainly yours as if already in your pocket."

"Armstrong—Rowden!" repeated the woman with anxious simplicity; "I never heard either of these names. What sort of a person is he?"

I described him minutely; but Madame Jaubert appeared to entertain little or no hope of discovering his whereabouts; and ultimately went away in a very disconsolate mood, after, however, arranging to meet me the next evening.

I met her as agreed. She could obtain, she said, no intelli-

gence of any reliable worth; and she pressed me for further particulars. Was Armstrong a drinking, a gaming, or a play-going man? I told her all I knew of his habits, and a gleam of hope glanced across her face as one or two indications were mentioned. I was to see her again on the morrow. It came; she was as far off as ever; and I advised her to waste no further time in the pursuit, but to at once endeavour to regain a position of respectability by the exercise of industry in the trade or business in which she was reputedly well-skilled. Madame Jaubert laughed scornfully; and a gleam, it seemed to me, of her never entirely subdued insanity shot out from her deep-set, flashing eyes. It was finally settled that I should meet her once more at the same place at about eight o'clock the next evening.

I arrived somewhat late at the appointed rendezvous, and found Madame Jaubert in a state of manifest excitement and impatience. She had, she was pretty sure, discovered Armstrong, and knew that he was at that moment in a house in Greek Street, Soho.

"Greek Street, Soho! Is he alone?"

"Yes; with the exception of a woman who is minding the premises, and of whom he is an acquaintance under another name. You will be able to secure him without the least risk or difficulty; but not an instant must be lost."

Madame Jaubert perceived my half-hesitation. "Surely," she exclaimed, "you are not afraid of one man! It's useless affecting to suspect *me* after what has occurred."

"True," I replied. "Lead on."

The house at which we stopped in Greek Street appeared to be an empty one, from the printed bills in the windows announcing it to be let or sold. Madame Jaubert knocked in a peculiar manner at the door, which was presently opened by a woman. "Is Mr. Brown still within?" Madame Jaubert asked in a low voice.

"Yes: what do you want with him?"

"I have brought a gentleman who will most likely be a purchaser of some of the goods he has to dispose of."

"Walk in, then, if you please," was the answer. We did so; and found ourselves, as the door closed, in pitch darkness. "This way," said the woman; "you shall have a light in half a minute."



"Let me guide you," said Madame Jaubert, as I groped onwards by the wall, and at the same time seizing my right hand. Instantly as she did so, I heard a rustle just behind me—two quick and violent blows descended on the back of my head, there was a flash before my eyes, a suppressed shout of exultation rang in my ears, and I fell insensible to the ground.

It was some time, on partially recovering my senses, before I could realise either what had occurred, or the situation in which I found myself. Gradually, however, the incidents attending the artfully-prepared treachery of Madame Jaubert grew into distinctness, and I pretty well comprehended my present position. I was lying at the bottom of a cart, blindfolded, gagged, handcuffed, and covered over by what, from their smell, seemed to be empty corn-sacks. The vehicle was moving at a pretty rapid rate, and judging from the roar and tumult without, through one of the busiest thoroughfares in London. It was Saturday evening; and I thought, from the character of the noises, and the tone of a clock just chiming ten, that we were in Tottenham Court Road. I endeavoured to rise, but found, as I might have expected, that it was impossible to do so, my captors having secured me to the floor of the cart by strong cords. There was nothing for it, therefore, but patience and resignation—word, easily pronounced, but difficult, under such circumstances, to realise in practice. My thoughts, doubtless in consequence of the blows I had received, soon became hurried and incoherent. A tumultuous throng of images swept confusedly past, of which the most constant and frequent were the faces of my wife and youngest child, whom I had kissed in his sleep just previous to my leaving home. Madame Jaubert and James Martin were also there; and ever and anon the menacing countenance of Levasseur stooped over me with a hideous expression, and I felt as if clutched in the fiery grasp of a demon. I have no doubt that the voice which sounded in my ear at the moment I was felled to the ground must have suggested the idea of the Swiss—faintly and imperfectly as I caught it. This tumult of brain only gradually subsided as the discordant uproar of the streets—which no doubt added to the excitement I was suffering under by suggesting the exasperating nearness of abundant help which could not be appealed to—died gradually away into a

silence only broken by the rumble of the cart-wheels, and the subdued talk of the driver and his companions, of whom there appeared to be two or three. At length the cart stopped; I heard a door unlocked and thrown open, and a few moments afterwards I was dragged from under the corn-sacks, carried up three flights of stairs, and dropped brutally upon the floor, till a light could be procured. Directly one was brought, I was raised to my feet, placed upright against a wooden partition, and staples having been driven into the panelling, securely fastened in that position, with cords passed through them, and round my armpits. This effected, an authoritative voice—the now distinct recognition of which thrilled me with dismay—ordered that I should be unblinded. It was done; and when my eyes became somewhat accustomed to the suddenly-dazzling light and glare, I saw Levasseur and the clerk Dubarle standing directly in front of me, their faces kindled into flame by fiendish triumph and delight. The report that they had been drowned was then a mistake, and they had incurred the peril of returning to this country for the purpose of avenging themselves upon me; and how could it be doubted that an opportunity, achieved at such fearful risk, would be effectually, remorselessly used? A pang of mortal terror shot through me, and then I strove to awaken in my heart a stern endurance and resolute contempt of death, with, I may now confess, very indifferent success. The woman Jaubert was, I also saw, present; and a man, whom I afterwards ascertained to be Martin, was standing near the doorway, with his back towards me. These two, at a brief intimation from Levasseur, went down-stairs; and then the fierce exultation of the two escaped convicts—of Levasseur especially—broke forth with wolfish rage and ferocity. “Ha—ha—ha!” shouted the Swiss, at the same time striking me over the face with his open hand, “you find, then, that others can plot as well as you can—dog, traitor, scoundrel that you are! ‘Au revoir—allons!’ was it, eh? Well, here we are, and I wish you joy of the meeting. Ha—ha! How dismal the rascal looks, Dubarle!”—(Again the coward struck me)—“He is hardly grateful to me, it seems, for having kept my word. I always do, my fine fellow,” he added, with a savage chuckle; “and never neglect to pay my debts of honour—yours, especially,” he continued, drawing a

pistol from his pocket, "shall be prompt payment, and with interest, too, scélérat!" He held the muzzle of the pistol to within a yard of my forehead, and placed his finger on the trigger. I instinctively closed my eyes, and tasted in that fearful moment the full bitterness of death; but my hour was not yet come. Instead of the flash and report which I expected would herald me into eternity, a taunting laugh from Levasseur at the terror he excited rang through the room.

"Come, come," said Dubarle, over whose face a gleam of commiseration, almost of repentance, had once or twice passed; "you will alarm that fellow down-stairs with your noise. We must, you know, wait till he is gone, and he appears to be in no hurry. In the meantime let us have a game of piquet for the first shot at the traitor's carcase."

"Excellent—capital!" shouted Levasseur, with savage glee. "A game of piquet; the stake, your life, Waters! A glorious game! and mind you see fair play. In the meantime, here's your health, and better luck next time, if you should chance to live to see it." He swallowed a draught of wine which Dubarle, after helping himself, had poured out for him; and then approaching me, with the silver cup he had drained in his hand, said, "Look at the crest! Do you recognise it—fool, idiot that you are?"

I did so readily enough: it was a portion of the plunder carried off from Portman Square.

"Come," again interposed Dubarle, "let us have our game."

The play began, and—— But I will dwell no longer upon this terrible passage in my police experience. Frequently even now the incidents of that night revisit me in dreams, and I awake with a start and cry of terror. In addition to the mental torture I endured, I was suffering under an agonizing thirst, caused by the fever of my blood, and the pressure of the absorbing gag, which still remained in my mouth. It was wonderful I did not lose my senses. At last the game was over; the Swiss won, and sprang to his feet with the roar of a wild beast.

At this moment Madame Jaubert entered the apartment somewhat hastily. "This man below," she said, "is getting insolent. He has taken it into his tipsy head that you mean to kill your prisoner, and he won't, he says, be involved in a

murder, which would be sure to be found out. I told him he was talking absurdly; but he is still not satisfied, so you had better go down and speak to him yourself."

I afterwards found, it may be as well to mention here, that Madame Jaubert and Martin had been induced to assist in entrapping me, in order that I might be out of the way when a friend of Levasseur, who had been committed to Newgate on a serious charge, came to be tried, I being the chief witness against him; and they were both assured that I had nothing more serious to apprehend than a few days' detention. In addition to a considerable money-present, Levasseur had, moreover, promised Madame Jaubert to pay her expenses to Paris, and assist in placing her in business there.

Levasseur muttered a savage imprecation on hearing the woman's message, and then said, "Come with me, Dubarle; if we cannot convince the fellow, we can at least silence him! Marie Duquesne, you will remain here."

As soon as they were gone, the woman eyed me with a compassionate expression, and approaching close to me, said in a low voice, "Do not be alarmed at their tricks and menaces. After Thursday you will be sure to be released."

I shook my head, and as distinctly as I could made a gesture with my fettered arms towards the table on which the wine was standing. She understood me. "If," said she, "you will promise not to call out, I will relieve you of the gag."

I eagerly nodded compliance. The gag was removed, and she held a cup of wine to my fevered lips. It was a draught from the waters of paradise, and hope, energy, life, were renewed within me as I drank.

"You are deceived," I said, in a guarded voice, the instant my burning thirst was satisfied. "They intend to murder me, and you will be involved as an accomplice."

"Nonsense," she replied. "They have been frightening you, that's all."

"I again repeat you are deceived. Release me from these fetters and cords, give me but a chance of at least selling my life as dearly as I can, and the money you told me you stood in need of shall be yours."

"Hark!" she exclaimed. "They are coming!"

"Bring down a couple of bottles of wine," said Levasseur from the bottom of the stairs. Madame Jaubert obeyed the order, and in a few minutes returned.

I renewed my supplications to be released, and was of course extremely liberal of promises.

"It is vain talking," said the woman. "I do not believe they will harm you; but even if it were as you say, it is too late now to retrace my steps. You cannot escape. That fool below is already three-parts intoxicated; they are both armed, and would hesitate at nothing if they but suspected treachery."

It was vain to urge her. She grew sullen and menacing; and was insisting that the gag should be replaced in my mouth, when a thought struck me.

"Levasseur called you Marie Duquesne just now; but surely your name is Jaubert—is it not?"

"Do not trouble yourself about my name," she replied; "that is my affair, not yours."

"Because if you *are* the Marie Duquesne who once kept a shop in Cranbourne Alley, and lost a child called Marie-Louise, I could tell you something."

A wild light broke from her dark eyes, and a suppressed scream from her lips. "I am that Marie Duquesne!" she said in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"Then I have to inform you that the child so long supposed to be lost I discovered nearly three weeks ago."

The woman fairly leapt towards me, clasped me fiercely by the arms, and peering in my face with eyes on fire with insane excitement, hissed out, "You lie—you lie, you dog! You are striving to deceive me! She is in heaven; the angels told me so long since."

I do not know, by the way, whether the falsehood I was endeavouring to palm off upon the woman was strictly justifiable or not; but I am fain to believe that there are few moralists that would not, under the circumstances, have acted pretty much as I did.

"If your child was lost when going on an errand to Coventry Street, and her name is Marie-Louise Duquesne, I tell you she is found. How should I otherwise have become acquainted with these particulars?"

"True—true," she muttered; "how else should he know? Where is she," added the woman in tones of agonized entreaty, as she sank down and clasped my knees. "Tell me—tell me, as you hope for life or mercy, where may I find my child?"

"Release me, give me a chance of escape, and to-morrow your child shall be in your arms. Refuse, and the secret dies with me."

She sprang quickly to her feet, unclasped the handcuffs, snatched a knife from the table, and cut the cords which bound me with eager haste. "Another draught of wine," she said, still in the same hurried, almost insane manner. "You have work to do! Now, whilst I secure the door, do you rub and chafe your stiffened joints." The door was soon fastened, and then she assisted in restoring the circulation to my partially-benumbed limbs. This was at last accomplished, and Marie Duquesne drew me towards a window, which she softly opened. "It is useless," she whispered, "to attempt a struggle with the men below. You must descend by this," and she placed her hand upon a lead water-pipe, which reached from the roof to within a few feet of the ground.

"And you," I said; "how are you to escape?"

"I will tell you. Do you hasten on towards Hampstead, from which we are distant in a northerly direction about a mile. There is a house at about half the distance. Procure help, and return as quickly as possible. The door-fastenings will resist some time, even should your flight be discovered. You will not fail me?"

"Be assured I will not." The descent was a difficult and somewhat perilous one, but it was safely accomplished, and I set off at the top of my speed towards Hampstead.

I had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile, when the distant sound of a horse's feet, coming at a slow trot towards me, caught my ear. I paused, to make sure I was not deceived, and as I did so, a wild scream from the direction I had left, followed by another and another, broke upon the stillness of the night. The scoundrels had no doubt discovered my escape, and were about to wreak their vengeance upon the unfortunate creature in their power. The trot of the horse which I had heard was, simultaneously with the breaking out of those wild outcries, increased

to a rapid gallop. "Hallo!" exclaimed the horseman as he came swiftly up. "Do you know where these screams come from?" It was the horse-patrol who thus providentially came up! I briefly stated that the life of a woman was at the mercy of two escaped convicts. "Then for God's sake jump up behind me!" exclaimed the patrol. "We shall be there in a couple of minutes." I did so: the horse—a powerful animal, and not entirely unused to carry double—started off, as if it comprehended the necessity for speed, and in a very brief space of time we were at the door of the house from which I had so lately escaped. Marie Duquesne, with her body half out of the window, was still wildly screaming as we rushed into the room below. There was no one there, and we swiftly ascended the stairs, at the top of which we could hear Levasseur and Dubarle thundering at the door, which they had unexpectedly found fastened, and hurling a storm of imprecations at the woman within, the noise of which enabled us to approach them pretty nearly before we were heard or perceived. Martin saw us first, and his sudden exclamation alarmed the others. Dubarle and Martin made a desperate rush to pass us, by which I was thrown on one side against the wall; and very fortunately, as the bullet levelled at me from a pistol Levasseur held in his hand would probably have finished me. Martin escaped, which I was not very sorry for; but the patrol pinned Dubarle safely, and I gripped Levasseur with a strength and ferocity against which he was powerless as an infant. Our victory was complete; and two hours afterwards, the recaptured convicts were safely lodged in a station-house.

I caused Madame Duquesne to be as gently undeceived the next morning as possible with respect to her child; but the reaction and disappointment proved too much for her wavering intellect. She relapsed into positive insanity, and was placed in Bedlam, where she remained two years. At the end of that period she was pronounced convalescent. A sufficient sum of money was raised by myself and others, not only to send her to Paris, but to enable her to set up as a milliner in a small but respectable way. As lately as last May, when I saw her there, she was in health both of mind and body, and doing comfortably.

With the concurrence of the police authorities, very little was

said publicly respecting my entrapment. It might perhaps have excited a monomania amongst liberated convicts—coloured and exaggerated as every incident would have been for the amusement of the public—to attempt similar exploits. I was also anxious to conceal the peril I had encountered from my wife; and it was not till I had left the police force that she was informed of it. Levasseur and Dubarle were convicted of returning from transportation before the term for which they had been sentenced had expired, and were this time sent across the seas for life. The reporters of the morning papers, or rather the reporter for the “Times,” “Herald,” “Chronicle,” “Post,” and “Advertiser,” gave precisely the same account, even to the misspelling of Levasseur’s name, dismissing the brief trial in the following paragraph, under the head of “Old Bailey Sessions:”—“Alphonse Dubarle (24) and Sebastian Levasson (49) were identified as unlawfully-returned convicts, and sentenced to transportation for life. The prisoners, it was understood, were connected with the late plate-robbery in Portman Square; but as a conviction could not have increased their punishment, the indictment was not pressed.”

Levasseur, I had almost forgotten to state, admitted that it was he who wounded me in Ryder’s Court, Leicester Square.





## CHAPTER IX.

MARY KINGSFORD.

TOWARDS the close of the year 1836 I was hurriedly despatched to Liverpool for the purpose of securing the person of one Charles James Marshall, a collecting clerk, who, it was suddenly discovered, had absconded with a considerable sum of money belonging to his employers. I was too late—Charles James Marshall having sailed in one of the American liners the day before my arrival in the northern commercial capital. This fact well ascertained, I immediately set out on my return to London. Winter had come upon us unusually early; the weather was bitterly cold; and a piercing wind caused the snow, which had been falling heavily for several hours, to gyrate in fierce, blinding eddies, and heaped it up here and there into large and dangerous drifts. The obstruction offered by the rapidly-congealing snow greatly delayed our progress between Liverpool and Birmingham; and at a few miles only distant from the latter city, the leading engine ran off the line. Fortunately, the rate at which we were travelling was a very slow one, and no accident of moment occurred. Having no luggage to care for, I walked on to Birmingham, where I found the parliamentary train just on the point of starting, and with some hesitation, on account of the severity of the weather, took my seat in one of the then very much exposed and uncomfortable carriages. We travelled steadily and safely, though slowly, along, and reached Rugby Station in the afternoon, where we were to remain, the guard told us, till a fast down-train had passed. All of us hurried as quickly as we could to the large room at this station, where blazing fires and other appliances soon thawed the half-frozen bodies, and loosened the tongues of the numerous and motley passengers. After recover-

ing the use of my benumbed limbs and faculties, I had leisure to look around and survey the miscellaneous assemblage about me.

Two persons had travelled in the same compartment with me from Birmingham, whose exterior, as disclosed by the dim light of the railway carriage, created some surprise that such splendidly-attired, fashionable gentlemen should stoop to journey by the plebeian penny-a-mile train. I could now observe them in a clearer light, and surprise at their apparent condescension vanished at once. To an eye less experienced than mine in the artifices and expedients familiar to a certain class of "swells," they might perhaps have passed muster for what they assumed to be, especially amidst the varied crowd of a "parliamentary," but their copper finery could not for a moment impose upon me. The watch-chains were, I saw, mosaic; the watches, so frequently displayed, gilt; eye-glasses the same; the coats, fur-collared, and cuffed, were ill-fitting and second-hand; ditto of the varnished boots and renovated velvet waistcoats; while the luxuriant moustaches and whiskers, and flowing wigs, were unmistakeably mere *pièces d'occasion*—assumed and diversified at pleasure. They were both apparently about fifty years of age; one of them perhaps one or two years less than that. I watched them narrowly, the more so from their making themselves ostentatiously attentive to a young woman—girl rather she seemed—of a remarkably graceful figure, but whose face I had not yet obtained a glimpse of. They made boisterous way for her to the fire, and were profuse and noisy in their offers of refreshment—all of which, I observed, were peremptorily declined. She was dressed in deep, unexpensive mourning; and from her timid gestures and averted head, whenever either of the fellows addressed her, was, it was evident, terrified as well as annoyed by their rude and insolent notice. I quietly drew near to the side of the fireplace at which she stood, and with some difficulty obtained a sight of her features. I was struck with extreme surprise—not so much at her singular beauty, as from an instantaneous conviction that she was known to me, or at least that I had seen her frequently before, but where or when I could not at all call to mind. Again I looked, and my first impression was confirmed. At this moment the elder of

the two men I have partially described placed his hand, with a rude familiarity, upon the girl's shoulder, proffering at the same time a glass of hot brandy and water for her acceptance. She turned sharply and indignantly away from the fellow; and looking round as if for protection, caught my eagerly-fixed gaze.

"Mr. Waters!" she impulsively ejaculated. "Oh, I am so glad!"

"Yes," I answered, "that is certainly my name; but I scarcely remember—stand back, fellow!" I angrily continued, as her tormentor, emboldened by the spirits he had drunk, pressed with a jeering grin upon his face towards her, still tendering the brandy and water. "Stand back!" He replied by a curse and a threat. The next moment his flowing wig was whirling across the room, and he standing with his bullet head bare but for a few locks of iron-gray, in an attitude of speechless rage and confusion, increased by the peals of laughter which greeted his ludicrous, unwigged aspect. He quickly put himself in a fighting attitude, and, backed by his companion, challenged me to battle. This was quite out of the question; and I was somewhat at a loss how to proceed, when the bell announcing the instant departure of the train rang out, my furious antagonist gathered up and adjusted his wig, and we all sallied forth to take our places—the young woman holding fast by my arm, and in a low, nervous voice, begging me not to leave her. I watched the two fellows take their seats, and then led her to the hindmost carriage, which we had to ourselves as far as the next station.

"Are Mrs. Waters and Emily quite well?" said the young woman, colouring and lowering her eyes beneath my earnest gaze, which she seemed for a moment to misinterpret.

"Quite—entirely so," I almost stammered. "You know us then?"

"Surely I do," she replied, reassured by my manner. "But you, it seems," she presently added, with a winning smile, "have quite forgotten little Mary Kingsford."

"Mary Kingsford!" I exclaimed, almost with a shout. "Why, so it is! But what a transformation a few years have effected!"

"Do you think so? Not *pretty* Mary Kingsford now then, I suppose?" she added, with a light, pleasant laugh.

"You know what I mean, you vain puss you!" I rejoined, quite gleefully; for I was overjoyed at meeting with the gentle, well-remembered playmate of my own eldest girl. We were old familiar friends—almost father and daughter—in an instant.

Little Mary Kingsford, I should state, was, when I left Yorkshire, one of the prettiest, most engaging children I had ever seen; and a petted favourite not only with us, but of every other family in the neighbourhood. She was the only child of Philip and Mary Kingsford—a humble, worthy, and much respected couple. The father was gardener to Sir Pyott Dalzell, and her mother eked out his wages to a respectable maintenance by keeping a cheap children's school. The change which a few years had wrought in the beautiful child was quite sufficient to account for my imperfect recognition of her; but the instant her name was mentioned, I at once recognised the rare comeliness which had charmed us all in her childhood. The soft brown eyes were the same, though now revealing profounder depths, and emitting a more pensive expression; the hair, though deepened in colour, was still golden; her complexion, lit up as it now was by a sweet blush, was brilliant as ever; whilst her child-person had become matured and developed into womanly symmetry and grace. The brilliancy of colour vanished from her cheek as I glanced meaningly at her mourning dress.

"Yes," she murmured, in a sad, quivering voice—"yes, father is gone! It will be six months come next Thursday that he died! Mother is well," she continued more cheerfully, after a pause, "in health, but poorly off; and I—and I," she added with a faint effort at a smile, "am going to London to seek my fortune!"

"To seek your fortune?"

"Yes; you know my cousin, Sophy Clarke? In one of her letters, she said she often saw you."

I nodded without speaking. I knew little of Sophia Clarke, except that she was the somewhat gay, coquettish shopwoman of a highly respectable confectioner in the Strand, whom I shall call by the name of Morris.

"I am to be Sophy's fellow shop-assistant," continued Mary Kingsford; "not of course at first at such good wages as she gets. So lucky for me, is it not, since I must go to service? And so kind, too, of Sophy to interest herself for me!"

"Well, it may be so. But surely I have heard—my wife at least has—that you and Richard Westlake were engaged?—Excuse me, Mary, I was not aware the subject was a painful or unpleasant one."

"Richard's father," she replied, with some spirit, "has higher views for his son. It is all off between us now," she added; "and perhaps it is for the best that it should be so."

I could have rightly interpreted these words without the aid of the partially-expressed sigh which followed them. The perilous position of so attractive, so inexperienced, so guileless a young creature, amidst the temptations and vanities of London, so painfully impressed and preoccupied me, that I scarcely uttered another word till the rapidly-diminishing rate of the train announced that we neared a station, after which it was probable we should have no further opportunity for private converse.

"Those men—those fellows at Rugby—where did you meet with them?" I inquired.

"About thirty or forty miles below Birmingham, where they entered the carriage in which I was seated. At Birmingham I managed to avoid them."

Little more passed between us till we reached London. Sophia Clarke received her cousin at the Euston Station, and was profuse of felicitations and compliments upon her arrival and personal appearance. After receiving a promise from Mary Kingsford to call and take tea with my wife and her old playmate on the following Sunday, I handed the two young women into a cab in waiting, and they drove off. I had not moved away from the spot when a voice a few paces behind me, which I thought I recognised, called out—"Quick, coachee, or you'll lose sight of them!" As I turned quickly round, another cab drove smartly off, which I followed at a run. I found, on reaching Lower Seymour Street, that I was not mistaken as to the owner of the voice, nor of his purpose. The fellow I had unwigged at Rugby thrust his body half out of the cab window,

and pointing to the vehicle which contained the two girls, called out to the driver "to mind and make no mistake." The man nodded intelligence, and lashed his horse into a faster pace. Nothing that I might do could prevent the fellows from ascertaining Mary Kingsford's place of abode; and as that was all that, for the present at least, need be apprehended, I desisted from pursuit, and bent my steps homewards.

Mary Kingsford kept her appointment on the Sunday, and, in reply to our questioning, said she liked her situation very well. Mr. and Mrs. Morris were exceedingly kind to her; so was Sophia. "Her cousin," she added, in reply to a look which I could not repress, "was perhaps a little gay and free of manner, but the best-hearted creature in the world." The two fellows who had followed them had, I found, already twice visited the shop; but their attentions appeared now to be exclusively directed towards Sophia Clarke, whose vanity they not a little gratified. The names they gave were Hartley and Simpson. So entirely guileless and unsophisticated was the gentle country maiden, that I saw she scarcely comprehended the hints and warnings which I threw out. At parting, however, she made me a serious promise that she would instantly apply to me should any difficulty or perplexity overtake her.

I often called in at the confectioner's, and was gratified to find that Mary's modest propriety of behaviour, in a somewhat difficult position, had gained her the goodwill of her employers, who invariably spoke of her with kindness and respect. Nevertheless, the cark and care of a London life, with its incessant employment and late hours, soon, I perceived, began to tell upon her health and spirits; and it was consequently with a strong emotion of pleasure I heard from my wife that she had seen a passage in a letter from Mary's mother, to the effect that the elder Westlake was betraying symptoms of yielding to the angry and passionate expostulations of his only son, relative to the enforced breaking off of his engagement with Mary Kingsford. The blush with which she presented the letter was, I was told, very eloquent.

One evening, on passing Morris's shop, I observed Hartley and Simpson there. They were swallowing custards and other confectionery with much gusto; and, from their new and costly

habiliments, seemed to be in surprisingly good case. They were smirking and smiling at the cousins with rude confidence; and Sophia Clarke, I was grieved to see, repaid their insulting impertinence by her most elaborate smiles and graces. I passed on; and presently meeting with a brother-detective, who, it struck me, might know something of the two gentlemen, I turned back with him, and pointed them out. A glance sufficed him.

"Hartley and Simpson, you say?" he remarked, after we had walked away to some distance; "those are only two of their numerous *aliases*. I cannot, however, say that I am as yet on very familiar terms with them; but as I am especially directed to cultivate their acquaintance, there is no doubt we shall be more intimate with each other before long. Gamblers, black-legs, swindlers, I already know them to be; and I would take odds they are not unfrequently something more, especially when fortune and the bones run cross with them."

"They appear to be in high feather just now," I remarked.

"Yes; they are connected, I suspect, with the gang who cleaned out young Garslade last week in Jermyn Street. I'd lay a trifle," added my friend, as I turned to leave him, "that one or both of them will wear the Queen's livery, gray turned up with yellow, before many weeks are past. Good-bye."

About a fortnight after this conversation, I and my wife paid a visit to Astley's, for the gratification of our youngsters, who had long been promised a sight of the equestrian marvels exhibited at that celebrated amphitheatre. It was the latter end of February; and when we came out of the theatre, we found the weather had changed to dark and sleety, with a sharp, nipping wind. I had to call at Scotland-yard; my wife and children consequently proceeded home in a cab without me; and after assisting to quell a slight disturbance originating in a gin-palace close by, I went on my way over Westminster Bridge. The inclement weather had cleared the streets and thoroughfares in a surprisingly short time; so that, excepting myself, no foot-passenger was visible on the bridge till I had about half crossed it, when a female figure, closely muffled up about the head, and sobbing bitterly, passed rapidly by on the

opposite side. I turned and gazed after the retreating figure ; it was a youthful, symmetrical one ; and after a few moments' hesitation, I determined to follow at a distance, and as unobservedly as I could. On the woman sped, without pause or hesitation, till she reached Astley's, where I observed her stop suddenly, and toss her arms in the air with a gesture of desperation. I quickened my steps, which she observing, uttered a slight scream, and darted swiftly off again, moaning and sobbing as she ran. The slight momentary glimpse I had obtained of her features beneath the gas-lamp opposite Astley's suggested a frightful apprehension, and I followed at my utmost speed. She turned at the first cross-street, and I should soon have overtaken her, but that in darting round the corner where she disappeared, I ran full butt against a stout, elderly gentleman, who was hurrying smartly along out of the weather. What with the suddenness of the shock and the slipperiness of the pavement, down we both reeled ; and by the time we had regained our feet, and growled savagely at each other, the young woman, whoever she was, had disappeared, and more than half-an-hour's eager search after her proved fruitless. At last I bethought me of hiding at one corner of Westminster Bridge. I had watched impatiently for about twenty minutes, when I observed the object of my pursuit stealing timidly and furtively towards the bridge on the opposite side of the way. As she came nearly abreast of where I stood, I darted forward ; she saw, without recognising me, and uttering an exclamation of terror, flew down towards the river, where a number of pieces of balk and other timber were fastened together, forming a kind of loose raft. I followed with desperate haste, for I saw that it was indeed Mary Kingsford, and loudly calling to her by name to stop. She did not appear to hear me, and in a few moments the unhappy girl had gained the end of the timber-raft. One instant she paused with clasped hands upon the brink, and in another had thrown herself into the dark and moaning river. On reaching the spot where she had disappeared, I could not at first see her, in consequence of the dark mourning dress she had on. Presently I caught sight of her, still upborne by her spread clothes, but already carried by the swift current beyond my reach. The only chance was to crawl along a piece of round timber which



projected further into the river, and by the end of which she must pass. This I effected with some difficulty ; and laying myself out at full length, vainly endeavoured, with outstretched, straining arms, to grasp her dress. There was nothing left for it but to plunge in after her. I will confess that I hesitated to do so. I was encumbered with a heavy dress, which there was no time to put off, and moreover, like most inland men, I was but an indifferent swimmer. My indecision quickly vanished. The wretched girl, though gradually sinking, had not yet uttered a cry, or appeared to struggle ; but when the chilling waters reached her lips, she seemed suddenly to revive to a consciousness of the horror of her fate ; she fought wildly with the engulfing tide, and shrieked piteously for help. Before one could count ten, I had grasped her by the arm, and lifted her head above the surface of the river. As I did so, I felt as if suddenly encased and weighed down by leaden garments, so quickly had my thick clothing and high boots sucked in the water. Vainly, thus burdened and impeded, did I endeavour to regain the raft ; the strong tide bore us outwards, and I glared round, in inexpressible dismay, for some means of extrication from the frightful peril in which I found myself involved. Happily, right in the direction the tide was drifting us, a large barge lay moored by a chain-cable. Eagerly I seized and twined one arm firmly round it, and thus partially secure, hallooed with renewed power for assistance. It soon came : a passer-by had witnessed the flight of the girl and my pursuit, and was already hastening with others to our assistance. A wherry was unmoored ; guided by my voice, they soon reached us ; and but a brief interval elapsed before we were safely housed in an adjoining tavern.

A change of dress, with which the landlord kindly supplied me, a blazing fire, and a couple of glasses of hot brandy and water, soon restored warmth and vigour to my chilled and partially benumbed limbs ; but more than two hours elapsed before Mary, who had swallowed a good deal of water, was in a condition to be removed. I had just sent for a cab, when two police-officers, well known to me, entered the room with official briskness. Mary screamed, staggered towards me, and clinging to my arm, besought me with frantic earnestness to save her.

"What is the meaning of this?" I exclaimed, addressing one of the police-officers.

"Merely," said he, "that the young woman that's clinging so tight to you has been committing an audacious robbery"—

"No—no—no!" broke in the terrified girl.

"Oh! of course you'll say so," continued the officer. "All I know is, that the diamond brooch was found snugly hid away in her own box. But come, we have been after you for the last three hours; so you had better come along at once."

"Save me!—save me!" sobbed poor Mary, as she tightened her grasp upon my arm, and looked with beseeching agony in my face.

"Be comforted," I whispered: "you shall go home with me. Calm yourself, Miss Kingsford," I added in a louder tone; "I no more believe you have stolen a diamond brooch than that I have."

"Bless you!—bless you!" she gasped, in the intervals of her convulsive sobs.

"There is some wretched misapprehension in this business, I am sure," I continued; "but at all events, I shall bail her—for this night, at least."

"Bail her! That is hardly regular."

"No; but you will tell the superintendent that Mary Kingsford is in my custody, and that I answer for her appearance to-morrow."

The men hesitated, but I stood too well at head-quarters for them to do more than hesitate; and the cab I had ordered being just then announced, I passed with Mary out of the room as quickly as I could, for I feared her senses were again leaving her. The air revived her somewhat, and I lifted her into the cab, placing myself beside her. She appeared to listen in fearful doubt whether I should be allowed to take her with me; and it was not till the wheels had made a score of revolutions that her fears vanished; then throwing herself upon my neck in an ecstasy of gratitude, she burst into a flood of tears, and continued till we reached home sobbing on my bosom like a broken-hearted child. She had, I found, been there about ten o'clock to seek me, and being told that I was gone to Astley's, had started off to find me there.

Mary still slept, or at least she had not risen, when I left home the following morning to endeavour to get at the bottom of the strange accusation preferred against her. I first saw the superintendent, who, after hearing what I had to say, quite approved of all that I had done, and entrusted the case entirely to my care. I next saw Mr. and Mrs. Morris and Sophia Clarke, and then waited upon the prosecutor, a youngish gentleman of the name of Saville, lodging in Essex Street, Strand. One or two things I heard necessitated a visit to other officers of police, incidentally, as I found, mixed up with the affair. By the time all this was done, and an effectual watch had been placed upon Mr. Augustus Saville's movements, evening had fallen, and I wended my way homewards, both to obtain a little rest and hear Mary Kingsford's version of the strange story.

The result of my enquiries may be thus briefly summed up. Ten days before Sophia Clarke told her cousin that she had orders for Covent-Garden Theatre; and as it was not one of their busy nights, she thought they might obtain leave to go. Mary expressed her doubt of this, as both Mr. and Mrs. Morris, who were strict, and somewhat fanatical, Dissenters, disapproved of playgoing, especially for young women. Nevertheless Sophia asked, informed Mary that the required permission had been readily accorded, and off they went in high spirits; Mary especially, who had never been to a theatre in her life before. When there they were joined by Hartley and Simpson, much to Mary's annoyance and vexation, especially as she saw that her cousin expected them. She had, in fact, accepted the orders from them. At the conclusion of the entertainment they all four came out together, when suddenly there arose a hustling and confusion, accompanied with loud outcries, and a violent swaying to and fro of the crowd. The disturbance was, however, soon quelled, and Mary and her cousin had reached the outer door, when two police-officers seized Hartley and his friend, and insisted upon their going with them. A scuffle ensued; but other officers being at hand, the two men were secured, and carried off. The cousins, terribly frightened, called a coach, and were very glad to find themselves safe at home again. And now it came out that Mr. and Mrs. Morris

had been told that they were going to spend the evening at *my* house, and had no idea they were going to the play! Vexed as Mary was at the deception, she was too kindly-tempered to refuse to keep her cousin's secret; especially knowing as she did that the discovery of the deceit Sophia had practised would in all probability be followed by her immediate discharge. Hartley and his friend swaggered on the following afternoon into the shop, and whispered Sophia that their arrest by the police had arisen from a strange mistake, for which the most ample apologies had been offered and accepted. After this matters went on as usual, except that Mary perceived a growing insolence and familiarity in Hartley's manner towards her. His language was frequently quite unintelligible, and once he asked her plainly "if she did not mean that he should go *shares* in the prize she had lately found?" Upon Mary replying that she did not comprehend him, his look became absolutely ferocious, and he exclaimed, "Oh, that's your game, is it? But don't try it on with me, my good girl, I advise you." So violent did he become, that Mr. Morris was attracted by the noise, and ultimately bundled him, neck and heels, out of the shop. She had not seen either him or his companion since.

On the evening of the previous day a gentleman whom she never remembered to have seen before, entered the shop, took a seat, and helped himself to a tart. She observed that after a while he looked at her very earnestly, and at length, approaching quite close, said, "You were at Covent-Garden Theatre last Tuesday evening week?" Mary was struck, as she said, all of a heap, for both Mr. and Mrs. Morris were in the shop, and heard the question.

"Oh no, no! you mistake," she said, hurriedly, and feeling at the same time her cheeks kindle into flame.

"Nay, but you were, though," rejoined the gentleman. And then, lowering his voice to a whisper, he said, "And let me advise you, if you would avoid exposure and condign punishment, to restore me the diamond brooch you robbed me of that evening."

Mary screamed with terror, and a regular scene ensued. She was obliged to confess she had told a falsehood in denying she was at the theatre on the night in question, and Mr. Morris after

that seemed inclined to believe anything of her. The gentleman persisted in his charge; but at the same time vehemently reiterating his assurance that all he wanted was his property; and it was ultimately decided that Mary's boxes, as well as her person, should be searched. This was done; and to her utter consternation the brooch was found concealed, they said, in a black silk reticule. Denials, asseverations, were vain. Mr. Saville identified the brooch, but once more offered to be content with its restoration. This Mr. Morris, a just, stern man, would not consent to, and he went out to summon a police-officer. Before he returned, Mary, by the advice of both her cousin and Mrs. Morris, had fled the house, and hurried in a state of distraction to find me, with what result the reader already knows.

"It is a wretched business," I observed to my wife, as soon as Mary Kingsford had retired to rest, at about nine o'clock in the evening. "Like you, I have no doubt of the poor girl's perfect innocence; but how to establish it by satisfactory evidence is another matter. I must take her to Bow Street the day after to-morrow."

"Good God, how dreadful! Can nothing be done? What does the prosecutor say his brooch is worth?"

"His uncle," he says, "gave a hundred and twenty guineas for it. But that signifies little; for were its worth only a hundred and twenty farthings, compromise is, you know, out of the question."

"I did not mean that. Can you show it me? I am a pretty good judge of the value of jewels."

"Yes, you can see it." I took it out of the desk in which I had locked it up, and placed it before her. It was a splendid emerald, encircled by large brilliants.

My wife twisted and turned it about, holding it in all sorts of lights, and at last said, "I do not believe that either the emerald or the brilliants are real—that the brooch is, in fact, worth twenty shillings intrinsically."

"Do you say so?" I exclaimed, as I jumped up from my chair, for my wife's words gave colour and consistence to a dim and faint suspicion which had crossed my mind. "Then this Saville is a manifest liar; and perhaps confederate

with—— But give me my hat ; I will ascertain this point at once.”

I hurried to a jeweller's shop, and found that my wife's opinion was correct ; apart from the workmanship, which was very fine, the brooch was valueless. Conjectures, suspicions, hopes, fears, chased each other with bewildering rapidity through my brain ; and in order to collect and arrange my thoughts, I stepped out of the whirl of the streets into Dolly's Chop-house, and decided, over a quiet glass of negus, upon my plan of operations.

The next morning there appeared at the top of the second column of the *Times* an earnest appeal, worded with careful obscurity, so that only the person to whom it was addressed should easily understand it, to the individual who had lost or been robbed of a false stone and brilliants at the theatre, to communicate with a certain person, whose address I gave, without delay, in order to save the reputation, perhaps the life, of an innocent person.

I was at the address I had given by nine o'clock. Several hours passed without bringing any one, and I was beginning to despair when a gentleman of the name of Bagshawe was announced : I fairly leaped for joy, for this was beyond my hopes.

A gentleman presently entered, of about thirty years of age, of a distinguished though somewhat dissipated aspect.

“This brooch is yours ?” said I, exhibiting it without delay or preface.

“It is ; and I am here to know what your singular advertisement means ?”

I briefly explained the situation of affairs.

“The rascals !” he broke in almost before I had finished : “I will briefly explain it all. A fellow of the name of Hartley, at least, that was the name he gave, robbed me, I was pretty sure, of this brooch. I pointed him out to the police and he was taken into custody ; but nothing being found upon him, he was discharged.”

“Not entirely, Mr. Bagshawe, on that account. You refused, when arrived at the station-house, to state what you had been robbed of ; and you, moreover, said, in presence of the culprit,

that you were to embark with your regiment for India the next day. That regiment, I have ascertained, did embark, as you said it would."

"True; but I had leave of absence, and shall take the Overland route. The truth is, that during the walk to the station-house I had leisure to reflect that if I made a formal charge it would lead to awkward disclosures. This brooch is an imitation of one presented me by a valued relative. Losses at play—since, for this unfortunate young woman's sake I *must* out with it—obliged me to part with the original; and I wore this in order to conceal the fact from my relative's knowledge."

"This will, sir," I replied, "prove, with a little management, quite sufficient for all purposes. You have no objection to accompany me to the superintendent?"

"Not in the least; only I wish the devil had the brooch as well as the fellow that stole it."

About half-past five o'clock on the same evening the street door was quietly opened by the landlord of the house in which Mr. Saville lodged, and I walked into the front room on the first floor, where I found the gentleman I sought languidly reclining on a sofa. He gathered himself smartly up at my appearance, and looked keenly in my face. He did not appear to like what he read there.

"I did not expect to see you to-day," he said at last.

"No, perhaps not; but I have news for you. Mr. Bagshawe, the owner of the hundred and twenty guinea brooch your deceased uncle gave you, did *not* sail for India, and——"

The wretched cur, before I could conclude, was on his knees, begging for mercy with disgusting abjectness. I could have spurned the scoundrel where he crawled.

"Come, sir!" I cried, "let us have no snivelling or humbug: mercy is not in my power, as you ought to know. Strive to deserve it. We want Hartley and Simpson, and cannot find them; you must aid us."

"Oh, yes, to be sure I will!" eagerly rejoined the rascal. "I will go for them at once," he added, with a kind of hesitating assurance.

"Nonsense! *Send* for them, you mean. Do so, and I will wait their arrival."

His note was dispatched by a sure hand ; and meanwhile I arranged the details of the expected meeting. I, and a friend, whom I momentarily expected, would ensconce ourselves behind a large screen in the room, whilst Mr. Augustus Saville would run playfully over the charming plot with his two friends, so that we might be able to fully appreciate its merits. Mr. Saville agreed. I rang the bell, an officer appeared, and we took our posts in readiness. We had scarcely done so when the street-bell rang, and Saville announced the arrival of his confederates. There was a twinkle in the fellow's green eyes which I thought I understood. "Do not try that on, Mr. Augustus Saville," I quietly remarked : "we are but two here, certainly, but there are half-a-dozen in waiting below."

No more was said, and in another minute the friends met. It was a boisterously-jolly meeting, as far as shaking hands and mutual felicitations on each other's good looks and health went. Saville was, I thought, the most obstreperously gay of all three.

"And yet, now I look at you, Saville, closely," said Hartley, "you don't look quite the thing. Have you seen a ghost?"

"No; but this cursed brooch affair worries me."

"Nonsense!—humbug!—it's all right: we are all embarked in the same boat. It's a regular three-handed game. I priggid it; Simmy here whipped it into pretty Mary's reticule, which she, I suppose, never looked into till the row came; and *you* claimed it—a regular merry-go-round, ain't it, eh? Ha! ha! ha!—Ha!"

"Quite so, Mr. Hartley," said I, suddenly facing him, and at the same time stamping on the floor; "as you say, a delightful merry-go-round; and here you perceive," I added, as the officers crowded into the room, "are more gentlemen to join in it."

I must not stain the paper with the curses, imprecations, blasphemies, which for a brief space resounded through the apartment. The rascals were safely and separately locked up a quarter of an hour afterwards; and before a month had passed away, all three were transported. It is scarcely necessary to remark, that they believed the brooch to be genuine, and of great value.



Mary Kingsford did not need to return to her employ. Westlake the elder withdrew his veto upon his son's choice, and the wedding was celebrated in the following May with great rejoicing; Mary's old playmate officiating as bridemaid, and I as bride's father. The still young couple have now a rather numerous family, and a home blessed with affection, peace, and competence. It was some time, however, before Mary recovered from the shock of her London adventure; and I am pretty sure that the disagreeable reminiscences inseparably connected in her mind with the metropolis will prevent at least *one* person from being present at the World's Great Fair.



## CHAPTER X.

## FLINT JACKSON

FARNHAM hops are world-famous, or at least famous in that huge portion of the world where English ale is drunk, and whereon I have a thousand times heard and read, the sun never sets. The name, therefore, of the pleasant Surrey village, in and about which the events I am about to relate occurred, is, I may fairly presume, known to many of my readers. I was ordered to Farnham to investigate a case of burglary, committed in the house of a gentleman of the name of Hursley, during the temporary absence of the family, which had completely non-plussed the unpractised Dogberrys of the place, albeit it was not a riddle at all difficult to read. The premises, it was quickly plain to me, had been broken, not into, but out of; and a watch being set upon the motions of the very specious and clever person left in charge of the house and property, it was speedily discovered that the robbery had been effected by herself and a confederate of the name of Dawkins, her brother-in-law. Some of the stolen goods were found secreted at his lodgings; but the most valuable portion, consisting of plate, and a small quantity of jewellery, had disappeared; it had questionless been converted into money, as considerable sums, in sovereigns, were found upon both Dawkins and the woman, Sarah Purday. Now, as it had been clearly ascertained that neither of the prisoners had left Farnham since the burglary, it was manifest there was a receiver near at hand who had purchased the missing articles. Dawkins and Purday were, however, dumb as stones upon the subject; and nothing occurred to point suspicion till early in the evening previous to the second examination of the prisoners before the magistrates, when Sarah Purday asked for pen, ink, and paper, for the purpose of writing to one Mr. Jackson, in

whose service she had formerly lived. I happened to be at the prison, and of course took the liberty of carefully unsealing her note and reading it. It revealed nothing; and save by its extremely cautious wording, and abrupt, peremptory tone, coming from a servant to her former master, suggested nothing. I had carefully reckoned the number of sheets of paper sent in to the cell, and now on recounting them found that three were missing. The turnkey returned immediately, and asked for the two other letters she had written. The woman denied having written any other, and for proof pointed to the torn fragments of the missing sheets lying on the floor. These were gathered up and brought to me, but I could make nothing out of them, every word having been carefully run through with the pen, and converted into an unintelligible blot. The request contained in the actually-written letter was one simple enough in itself, merely, "that Mr. Jackson would not on any account fail to provide her, in consideration of past services, with legal assistance on the morrow." The first nine words were strongly underlined; and I made out after a good deal of trouble that the word "pre-tence" had been partially effaced, and "account" substituted for it.

"She need not have wasted three sheets of paper upon such a nonsensical request as that," observed the turnkey. "Old Jackson wouldn't shell out sixpence to save her or anybody else from the gallows."

"I am of a different opinion; but tell me what sort of a person is this former master of hers?"

"All I know about him is that he's a cross-grained, old curmudgeon, living about a mile out of Farnham, who scrapes money together by lending small sums upon notes-of-hand at short dates, and at a thundering interest. Flint Jackson, folk about here call him."

"At all events, forward the letter at once, and to-morrow we shall see—what we shall see. Good-evening."

It turned out as I anticipated. A few minutes after the prisoners were brought into the justice-room, a Guildford solicitor of much local celebrity arrived, and announced that he appeared for both the inculpated parties. He was allowed a private conference with them, at the close of which he stated

that his clients would reserve their defence. They were at once committed for trial, and I overheard the solicitor assure the woman that the ablest counsel on the circuit would be retained on their behalf.

I had no longer a doubt that it was my duty to know something further of this suddenly-generous Flint Jackson, though how to set about it was a matter of considerable difficulty. There was no legal pretence for a search-warrant, and I doubted the prudence of proceeding upon my own responsibility with so astute an old fox as Jackson was represented to be ; for supposing him to be a confederate with the burglars, he had by this time in all probability sent the stolen property away—to London in all likelihood ; and should I find nothing, the consequences of ransacking his house merely because he had provided a former servant with legal assistance would be serious. Under these circumstances I wrote to head-quarters for instructions, and by return of post received orders to prosecute the inquiry thoroughly, but cautiously, and to consider time as nothing so long as there appeared a chance of fixing Jackson with the guilt of receiving the plunder. Another suspicious circumstance that I have omitted to notice in its place was that the Guildford solicitor tendered bail for the prisoners to any reasonable amount, and named Enoch Jackson as one of the securities. Bail was, however, refused.

There was no need for over-hurrying the business, as the prisoners were committed to the Surrey Spring Assizes, and it was now the season of the hop-harvest—a delightful and hilarious period about Farnham when the weather is fine and the yield abundant. I, however, lost no time in making diligent and minute inquiry as to the character and habits of Jackson, and the result was a full conviction that nothing but the fear of being denounced as an accomplice could have induced such a miserly, iron-hearted rogue to put himself to charges in defence of the imprisoned burglars.

One afternoon, whilst pondering the matter, and at the same time enjoying the prettiest and cheerfullest of rural sights, that of hop-picking, the apothecary at whose house I was lodging—we will call him Mr. Morgan ; he *was* a Welshman—tapped me suddenly on the shoulder, and looking sharply round, I per-

ceived he had something he deemed of importance to communicate.

"What is it?" I said, quickly.

"The oddest thing in the world. There's Flint Jackson, his deaf old woman, and the young people lodging with him, all drinking and boozing away at yon alehouse."

"Show them to me, if you please."

A few minutes brought us to the place of boisterous entertainment, the lower room of which was suffocatingly full of tipplers and tobacco-smoke. We nevertheless contrived to edge ourselves in; and my companion stealthily pointed out the group, who were seated together near the farther window, and then left me to myself.

The appearance of Jackson entirely answered to the popular prefix of Flint attached to his name. He was a wiry, gnarled, heavy-browed, iron-jawed fellow of about sixty, with deep-set eyes aglow with sinister and greedy instincts. His wife, older than he, and as deaf apparently as the door of a dungeon, wore a simpering, imbecile look of wonderment, it seemed to me, at the presence of such unusual and abundant cheer. The young people who lodged with Jackson were really a very frank, honest, good-looking couple, though not then appearing to advantage—the countenance of Henry Rogers being flushed and inflamed with drink, and that of his wife clouded with frowns, at the situation in which she found herself, and the riotous conduct of her husband. Their brief history was this:—They had both been servants in a family living not far distant from Farnham—Sir Thomas Lethbridge's, I understood—when about three or four months previous to the present time Flint Jackson, who had once been in an attorney's office, discovered that Henry Rogers, in consequence of the death of a distant relative in London, was entitled to property worth something like £1500. There were, however, some law difficulties in the way, which Jackson offered, if the business was placed in his hands, to overcome for a consideration, and in the meantime to supply board and lodging and such necessary sums of money as Henry Rogers might require. With this brilliant prospect in view, service became at once utterly distasteful. The fortunate legatee had for some time courted Mary Elkins, one of the

ladies maids, a pretty, bright-eyed brunette ; and they were both united in the bonds of holy matrimony on the very day the "warnings" they had given expired. Since then they had lived at Jackson's house in daily expectation of their "fortune," with which they proposed to start in the public line.

Finding myself unrecognised, I called boldly for a pot and a pipe, and after some manœuvring contrived to seat myself within ear-shot of Jackson and his party. They presented a strange study. Henry Rogers was boisterously excited, and not only drinking freely himself, but treating a dozen fellows round him, the cost of which he from time to time called upon "old Flint," as he courteously styled his ancient friend, to discharge.

"Come, fork out, old Flint!" he cried again and again. "It'll be all right, you know, in a day or two, and a few half-pence over. Shell out, old fellow! What signifies, so you're happy?"

Jackson complied with an affectation of acquiescent gaiety ludicrous to behold. It was evident that each successive pull at his purse was like wrenching a tooth out of his head, and yet, while the dimmest of smiles wrinkled his wolfish mouth, he kept exclaiming: "A fine lad—a fine lad! generous as a prince—generous as a prince! Good Lord, another round! He minds money no more than as if gold was as plentiful as gravel! but a fine, generous lad, for all that!"

Jackson, I perceived, drank considerably, as if incited thereto by compressed savageness. The pretty young wife would not taste a drop, but tears frequently filled her eyes, and bitterness pointed her words as she vainly implored her husband to leave the place and go home with her. To all her remonstrances the maudlin drunkard replied only by foolery, varied occasionally by an attempt at a line or two of the song of "The Thorn."

"But you *will* plant thorns, Henry," rejoined the provoked wife, in a louder and angrier tone than she ought perhaps to have used—"not only in my bosom, but your own, if you go on in this sottish, disgraceful way."

"Always quarrelling, always quarrelling!" remarked Jackson, pointedly, towards the bystanders—"always quarrelling!"

"Who is always quarrelling?" demanded the young wife, sharply. "Do you mean me and Henry?"

"I was only saying, my dear, that you don't like your husband to be so generous and free-hearted—that's all," replied Jackson, with a confidential wink at the persons near him.

"Free-hearted and generous! Fool-hearted and crazy, you mean!" rejoined the wife, who was much excited; "and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to give him money for such brutish purposes."

"Always quarrelling, always quarrelling!" iterated Jackson, but this time unheard by Mrs. Rogers—"always, perpetually quarrelling!"

I could not quite comprehend all this. If so large a sum as 1500*l.* was really coming to the young man, why should Jackson wince as he did at disbursing small amounts which he could repay himself with abundant interest? If otherwise—and it was probable he should not be repaid—what meant his eternal, "fine, generous lad!" "spirited young man!" and so on? What, above all, meant that look of diabolical hate which shot out from his cavernous eyes towards Henry Rogers when he thought himself unobserved, just after satisfying a fresh claim on his purse? Much practice in reading the faces and deportment of such men made it pretty clear to me that Jackson's course of action respecting the young man and his money was not yet decided upon in his own mind; that he was still perplexed and irresolute; and hence the apparent contradiction in his words and acts.

Henry Rogers at length dropped asleep, with his head upon one of the settle-tables; Jackson sank into sullen silence; the noisy room grew quiet; and I came away.

I was impressed with a belief that Jackson entertained some sinister design against his youthful and inexperienced lodgers, and I determined to acquaint them with my suspicions. For this purpose, Mr. Morgan, who had a patient living near Jackson's house, undertook to invite them to tea on some early evening, on pretence that he had heard of a tavern that might suit them when they should receive their fortune. Let me confess, too, that I had another design besides putting the young people on their guard against Jackson. I thought it very probable that it would not be difficult to glean from them some interesting and suggestive particulars concerning the

ways, means, practices, outgoings and incomings, of their worthy landlord's household.

Four more days passed unprofitably away, and I was becoming weary of the business, when about five o'clock in the afternoon the apothecary galloped up to his door on a borrowed horse, jumped off with surprising celerity, and with a face as white as his own magnesia, burst out as he hurried into the room where I was sitting: "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! Henry Rogers has been poisoned, and by his wife!"

"Poisoned!"

"Yes, poisoned; although, thanks to my being on the spot, I think he will recover. But I must instantly to Dr. Edwards: I will tell you all when I return."

The promised "all" was this: Morgan was passing slowly by Jackson's house, in the hope of seeing either Mr. or Mrs. Rogers, when the servant-woman, Jane Riddet, ran out and begged him to come in, as their lodger had been taken suddenly ill. Ill indeed! The surface of his body was cold as death, and the apothecary quickly discovered that he had been poisoned with sulphuric acid (oil of vitriol), a quantity of which he, Morgan, had sold a few days previously to Mrs. Rogers, who, when purchasing it, said Mr. Jackson wanted it to apply to some warts that annoyed him. Morgan fortunately knew the proper remedy, and desired Jackson, who was in the room, and seemingly very anxious and flurried, to bring some soap instantly, a solution of which he proposed to give immediately to the seemingly dying man. The woman-servant was gone to find Mrs. Rogers, who had left about ten minutes before, having first made the tea in which the poison had been taken. Jackson hurried out of the apartment, but was gone so long that Morgan, becoming impatient, scraped a quantity of plaster off the wall, and administered it with the best effect. At last Jackson came back, and said there was unfortunately not a particle of soap in the house. A few minutes afterwards the young wife, alarmed at the woman-servant's tidings, flew into the room in an agony of alarm and grief. Simulated alarm, crocodile grief, Mr. Morgan said; for there could, in his opinion, be no doubt that she had attempted to destroy her husband. Mr. Jackson, on being questioned,



peremptorily denied that he had ever desired Mrs. Rogers to procure sulphuric acid for him, or had received any from her—a statement which so confounded the young woman that she instantly fainted. The upshot was that Mrs. Rogers was taken into custody and lodged in prison.

This terrible news flew through Farnham like wildfire. In a few minutes it was upon everybody's tongue; the hints of the quarrelsome life the young couple led, artfully spread by Jackson, were recalled, and no doubt appeared to be entertained of the truth of the dreadful charge. I had no doubt either; but my conviction was not that of the Farnham folk. This, then, was the solution of the struggle I had seen going on in Jackson's mind: this the realisation of the dark thought which I had imperfectly read in the sinister glances of his restless eyes. He had intended to destroy both the husband and wife—the one by poison, and the other by the law! Doubtless, then, the £1500 had been obtained, and this was the wretched man's infernal device for retaining it! I went over with Morgan early the next morning to see the patient, and found that, thanks to the prompt antidote administered, and Dr. Edwards's subsequent active treatment, he was rapidly recovering. The still-suffering young man, I was glad to find, would not believe for a moment in his wife's guilt. I watched the looks and movements of Jackson attentively—a scrutiny which he, now aware of my vocation, by no means appeared to relish.

"Pray," said I, suddenly addressing Riddet, the woman-servant—"pray, how did it happen that you had no soap in such a house as this yesterday evening?"

"No soap!" echoed the woman, with a stare of surprise. "Why"—

"No—no soap," hastily broke in her master with loud and menacing emphasis. "There was not a morsel in the house. I bought some afterwards in Farnham."

The cowed and bewildered woman slunk away. I was more than satisfied; and judging by Jackson's countenance, which changed beneath my look to the colour of the lime-washed wall against which he stood, he surmised that I was.

My conviction, however, was not evidence, and I felt that I should need even more than my wonted good fortune to bring

the black crime home to the real perpetrator. For the present, at all events, I must keep silence—a resolve I found hard to persist in at the examination of the accused wife, an hour or two afterwards, before the county magistrates. Jackson had hardened himself to iron, and gave his lying evidence with ruthless self-possession. He had *not* desired Mrs. Rogers to purchase sulphuric acid; had *not* received any from her. In addition also to his testimony that she and her husband were always quarrelling, it was proved by a respectable person that high words had passed between them on the evening previous to the day the criminal offence was committed, and that foolish, passionate expressions had escaped her about wishing to be rid of such a drunken wretch. This evidence, combined with the medical testimony, appeared so conclusive to the magistrates, that, spite of the unfortunate woman's wild protestations of innocence, and the rending agony which convulsed her frame, and almost choked her utterance, she was remanded to prison till that day week, when, the magistrates informed her, she would be again brought up for the merely formal completion of the depositions, and be then fully committed on the capital charge.

I was greatly disturbed, and walked for two or three hours about the quiet neighbourhood of Farnham, revolving a hundred fragments of schemes for bringing the truth to light, without arriving at any feasible conclusion. Only one mode of procedure seemed to offer, and that but dimly, a hope of success. It was, however, the best I could hit upon, and I directed my steps towards the Farnham prison. Sarah Purday had not yet, I remembered, been removed to the county jail at Guildford.

"Is Sarah Purday," I asked the turnkey, "more reconciled to her position than she was?"

"She's just the same—bitter as gall, and venomous as a viper."

This woman, I should state, was a person of fierce will and strong passions, and in early life had been respectably situated.

"Just step into her cell," I continued, "upon some excuse or other, and carelessly drop a hint that if she could prevail upon

Jackson to get her brought by *habeas* before a judge in London, there could be no doubt of her being bailed."

The man stared, but after a few words of pretended explanation, went off to do as I requested. He was not long gone. "She's all in a twitteration at the thoughts of it," he said; "and must have pen, ink, and paper without a moment's delay, bless her consequence!"

These were supplied; and I was soon in possession of her letter, couched cautiously, but more peremptorily than the former one. I need hardly say it did not reach its destination. She passed the next day in a state of feverish impatience; and no answer returning, wrote again, her words this time conveying an evident though indistinct threat. I refrained from visiting her till two days had thus passed, and found her, as I expected, eaten up with fury. She glared at me as I entered the cell like a chained tigress.

"You appear vexed," I said, "no doubt, because Jackson declines to get you bailed. He ought not to refuse you such a trifling service, considering all things."

"All what things?" replied the woman, eyeing me fiercely.

"That you know best, though I have a shrewd guess."

"What do you guess? and what are you driving at?"

"I will deal frankly with you, Sarah Purday. In the first place, you must plainly perceive that your *friend* Jackson has cast you off—abandoned you to your fate; and that fate will, there can be no doubt, be transportation."

"Well," she impatiently snarled, "suppose so; what then?"

"This—that you can help yourself in this difficulty by helping me."

"As how?"

"In the first place, give me the means of convicting Jackson of having received the stolen property."

"Ha! How do you know that?"

"Oh, I know it very well—as well almost as you do. But this is not my chief object; there is another, far more important one," and I ran over the incidents relative to the attempt at poisoning. "Now," I resumed, "tell me, if you will, your opinion on this matter."

"That it was Jackson administered the poison, and certainly not the young woman," she replied, with vengeful promptness.

"My own conviction! This, then, is my proposition: you are sharp-witted, and know this fellow's ways, habits, and propensities thoroughly—I, too, have heard something of them—and it strikes me that you could suggest some plan, some device grounded on that knowledge, whereby the truth might come to light."

The woman looked fixedly at me for some time without speaking. As I meant fairly and honestly by her, I could bear her gaze without shrinking.

"Supposing I could assist you," she at last said, "how would that help me?"

"It would help you greatly. You would, no doubt, still be convicted of the burglary, for the evidence is irresistible; but if in the meantime you should have been instrumental in saving the life of an innocent person, and of bringing a great criminal to justice, there cannot be a question that the Queen's mercy would be extended to you, and the punishment be merely a nominal one."

"If I were sure of that!" she murmured, with a burning scrutiny in her eyes, which were still fixed upon my countenance—"if I were sure of that! But you are misleading me."

"Believe me, I am not. I speak in perfect sincerity. Take time to consider the matter. I will look in again in about an hour; and, pray, do not forget that it is your sole and last chance."

I left her, and did not return till more than three hours had passed away. Sarah Purday was pacing the cell in a frenzy of inquietude.

"I thought you had forgotten me. Now," she continued with rapid vehemence, "tell me, on your word of honour as a man, do you truly believe that if I can effectually assist you it will avail me with her Majesty?"

"I am as positive it will as I am of my own life."

"Well, then, I *will* assist you. First, then, Jackson was a confederate with Dawkins and myself, and received the plate and jewellery, for which he paid us less than one-third of the value."

"Rogers and his wife were not, I hope, cognizant of this?"

"Certainly not; but Jackson's wife and the woman-servant, Riddet, were. I have been turning the other business over in my mind," she continued, speaking with increasing emotion and rapidity; "and, oh, believe me, Mr. Waters, if you can, that it is not solely a selfish motive which induces me to aid in saving Mary Rogers from destruction. I was once myself— Ah, God!"

Tears welled up in the fierce eyes, but they were quickly brushed away, and she continued somewhat more calmly: "You have heard, I dare say, that Jackson has a strange habit of talking in his sleep?"

"I have, and that he once consulted Morgan as to whether there was any cure for it. It was that which partly suggested"—

"It is, I believe, a mere fancy of his," she interrupted; "or at any rate the habit is not so frequent, nor what he says so intelligible, as he thoroughly believes and fears it, from some former circumstances, to be. His deaf wife cannot undeceive him, and he takes care never even to doze except in her presence only."

"This is not, then, so promising as I hoped."

"Have patience. It is full of promise, as we will manage. Every evening Jackson frequents a low gambling-house, where he almost invariably wins small sums at cards—by craft, no doubt, as he never drinks there. When he returns home at about ten o'clock, his constant habit is to go into the front-parlour, where his wife is sure to be sitting at that hour. He carefully locks the door, helps himself to a glass of brandy and water—plentifully of late—and falls asleep in his arm-chair; and there they both doze away, sometimes till one o'clock—always till past twelve."

"Well; but I do not see how"—

"Hear me out, if you please. Jackson never wastes a candle to drink or sleep by, and at this time of the year there will be no fire. If he speaks to his wife he does not expect her, from her wooden deafness, to answer him. Do you begin to perceive my drift?"

"Upon my word, I do not."

"What—if upon awakening, Jackson finds that his wife is Mr. Waters, and that Mr. Waters relates to him all that he has disclosed in his sleep : that Mr. Hursley's plate is buried in the garden near the lilac-tree ; that he, Jackson, received a thousand pounds six weeks ago of Henry Rogers's fortune, and that the money is now in the recess on the top-landing, the key of which is in his breast-pocket ; that he was the receiver of the plate stolen from a house in the Close at Salisbury a twelvemonth ago, and sold in London for four hundred and fifty pounds. All this hurled at him," continued the woman, with wild energy and flashing eyes—"what else might not a bold, quick-witted man make him believe he had confessed, revealed in his brief sleep ? "

I had been sitting on a bench ; but as these rapid disclosures burst from her lips, and I saw the use to which they might be turned, I rose slowly and in some sort involuntarily to my feet, lifted up, as it were, by the energy of her fiery words.

"God reward you !" I exclaimed, shaking both her hands in mine. "You have, unless I blunder, rescued an innocent woman from the scaffold. I see it all. Farewell ! "

"Mr. Waters !" she exclaimed, in a changed, palpitating voice, as I was passing forth ; "when all is done, you will not forget me ? "

"That I will not, by my own hopes of mercy in the hereafter. Adieu ! "

At a quarter past nine that evening I, accompanied by two Farnham constables, knocked at the door of Jackson's house. Henry Rogers, I should state, had been removed to the village. The door was opened by the woman-servant, and we went in. "I have a warrant for your arrest, Jane Riddet," I said, "as an accomplice in the plate-stealing the other day. There, don't scream, but listen to me." I then intimated the terms upon which alone she could expect favour. She tremblingly promised compliance ; and after placing the constables outside, in concealment, but within hearing, I proceeded to the parlour, secured the terrified old woman, and confined her safely in a distant out-house.

"Now, Riddet," I said, "quick with one of the old lady's gowns, a shawl, a cap, *et cetera*." These were brought, and I

returned to the parlour. It was a roomy apartment, with small, diamond-paned windows, and just then but very faintly illumined by the starlight. There were two large, high-backed easy-chairs, and I prepared to take possession of the one recently vacated by Jackson's wife. "You must perfectly understand," were my parting words to the trembling servant, "that we intend standing no nonsense with either you or your master. You cannot escape; but if you let Mr. Jackson in as usual, and he enters this room as usual, no harm will befall you; if otherwise, you will be unquestionably transported. Now, go."

My toilet was not so easily accomplished as I thought it would be. The gown did not meet at the back by about a foot; that, however, was of little consequence, as the high chair concealed the deficiency; neither did the shortness of the sleeves matter much, as the ample shawl could be made to hide my too great length of arm; but the skirt was scarcely lower than a Highlander's, and how the deuce I was to crook my booted legs up out of view, even in that gloomy starlight, I could hardly imagine. The cap also was far too small; still, with an ample kerchief in my hand, my whiskers might, I thought, be concealed. I was still fidgeting with these arrangements when Jackson knocked at his door. The servant admitted him without remark, and he presently entered the room, carefully locked the door, and jolted down, so to speak, in the fellow easy-chair to mine.

He was silent for a few moments, and then he bawled out: "She'll swing for it, they say—swing for it, d'ye hear, dame? But no, of course she don't—deafer and deafer, deafer and deafer every day. It'll be a precious good job when the parson says his last prayers over her as well as others."

He then got up, and went to a cupboard. I could hear—for I dared not look up—by the jingling of glasses and the out-pouring of liquids that he was helping himself to his spirituous sleeping-draughts. He reseated himself, and drank in moody silence, except now and then mumbling drowsily to himself, but in so low a tone that I could make nothing out of it save an occasional curse or blasphemy. It was nearly eleven o'clock before the muttered self-communing ceased, and his heavy head sank upon the back of the easy-chair. He was very restless, and it was evident that even his sleeping brain laboured with

affrighting and oppressive images ; but the mutterings, as before he slept, were confused and indistinct. At length—half an hour had perhaps thus passed—the troubled moanings became for a few moments clearly audible. “Ha—ha—ha!” he burst out, “how are you off for soap? Ho—ho! done there, my boy; ha—ha! But no—no. Wall-plaster! Who could have thought it? But for that I—I— What do you stare at me so for, you infernal blue-bottle? You—you”—Again the dream-utterance sank into indistinctness, and I comprehended nothing more.

About half-past twelve o’clock he awoke, rose, stretched himself, and said: “Come, dame, let’s to bed; it’s getting chilly here.”

“Dame” did not answer, and he again went towards the cupboard. “Here’s a candle-end will do for us,” he muttered. A lucifer-match was drawn across the wall, he lit the candle, and stumbled towards me, for he was scarcely yet awake. “Come, dame, come! Why, thee beest sleeping like a dead un! Wake up, will thee— Ah! murder! thieves! mur!”—

My grasp was on the wretch’s throat; but there was no occasion to use force; he recognized me, and nerveless, paralyzed, sank on the floor, incapable of motion, much less of resistance; and could only gaze in my face in dumb affright and horror.

“Give me the key of the recess up-stairs, which you carry in your breast-pocket. In your sleep, unhappy man, you have revealed everything.”

An inarticulate shriek of terror replied to me. I was silent; and presently he gasped: “Wha—at, what have I said?”

“That Mr. Hursley’s plate is buried in the garden by the lilac-tree; that you have received a thousand pounds belonging to the man you tried to poison; that you netted four hundred and fifty pounds by the plate stolen at Salisbury; that you dexterously contrived to slip the sulphuric acid into the tea unseen by Henry Roger’s wife.”

The shriek or scream was repeated, and he was for several moments speechless with consternation. A ray of hope gleamed suddenly in his flaming eyes.

“It is true—it is true!” he hurriedly ejaculated; “useless—useless—useless to deny it. But you are alone, and poor, poor, no doubt. A thousand pounds!—more, more than that; *two*



thousand pounds in gold—gold, all in gold—I will give you to spare me, to let me escape !”

“Where did you hide the soap on the day when you confess you tried to poison Henry Rogers ?”

“In the recess you spoke of. But think ! Two thousand pounds in gold—all in gold——”

As he spoke, I suddenly grasped the villain’s hands, pressed them together, and in another instant the snapping of a handcuff pronounced my answer. A yell of anguish burst from the miserable man, so loud and piercing, that the constables outside hurried to the outer-door, and knocked hastily for admittance. They were let in by the servant-woman; and in half an hour afterwards the three prisoners—Jackson, his wife, and Jane Riddet—were safe in Farnham prison.

A few sentences will conclude this narrative. Mary Rogers was brought up on the following day, and, on my evidence, discharged. Her husband, I have heard, has since proved a better and a wiser man. Jackson was convicted at the Guildford assize of guiltily receiving the Hursley plate, and sentenced to transportation for life. This being so, the graver charge of attempting to poison was not pressed. There was no moral doubt of his guilt; but the legal proof of it rested solely on his own hurried confession, which counsel would no doubt have contended ought not to be received. His wife and the servant were leniently dealt with.

Sarah Purday was convicted, and sentenced to transportation. I did not forget my promise; and a statement of the previously-narrated circumstances having been drawn up and forwarded to the Queen and the Home Secretary, a pardon, after some delay, was issued. There were painful circumstances in her history which, after strict inquiry, told favourably for her. Several benevolent persons interested themselves in her behalf, and she was sent out to Canada, where she had some relatives, and has, I believe, prospered there.

This affair caused considerable hubbub at the time, and much admiration was expressed by the country people at the boldness and dexterity of the London “runner;” whereas, in fact, the successful result was entirely attributable to the opportune revelations of Sarah Purday.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE MONOMANIAC.

THE following narrative relates more to medical than to criminal history ; but as the affair came in some degree under my notice as a public officer, I have thought it might not be altogether out of place in these slight outlines of police experience. Strange and unaccountable as it may at first appear, its general truth will hardly be questioned by those who have had opportunities of observing the fantastic delusions which haunt and dominate the human brain in certain phases of mental aberration.

On arriving in London in 1831, I took lodgings at a Mr. Renshaw's, in Mile-End Road, not far from the turnpike gate. My inducement to do so was partly the cheapness and neatness of the accommodation, partly that the landlord's maternal uncle, a Mr. Oxley, was slightly known to me. Henry Renshaw I knew by reputation only, he having left Yorkshire ten or eleven years before, and even that knowledge was slight and vague. I had heard that a tragical event had cast a deep shadow over his after-life ; that he had been for some months the inmate of a private lunatic asylum ; and that some persons believed his brain had never thoroughly recovered its original healthy action. In this opinion both my wife and myself very soon concurred ; and yet I am not sure that we could have given a satisfactory reason for such belief. He was, it is true, usually kind and gentle, even to the verge of simplicity, but his general mode of expressing himself and conducting business was quite coherent and sensible ; although, in spite of his resigned cheerfulness of tone and manner, it was at times quite evident that, whatever the mental hurt he had received, it had left a rankling, perhaps remorseful, sting behind. A small, well-executed portrait in his sitting-room suggested a conjecture of the nature of the

calamity which had befallen him. It was that of a fair, mild-eyed, very young woman, but of a pensive, almost mournful, cast of features, as if the coming event, briefly recorded in the lower right-hand corner of the painting, had already, during life and health, cast its projecting shadow over her. That brief record was this:—"Laura Hargreaves, born 1804; drowned 1821." No direct allusion to the picture ever passed his lips in my hearing, although, from being able to chat together of Yorkshire scenes and times, we speedily became excellent friends. Still, there were not wanting, from time to time, significant indications, though difficult to place in evidence, that the fire of insanity had not been wholly quenched, but still smouldered and glowed beneath the habit-hardened crust which concealed it from the careless or casual observer. Exciting circumstances, not very long after my arrival in the metropolis, unfortunately kindled those brief wild sparkles into a furious and consuming flame.

Mr. Renshaw was in fair circumstances—that is, his income, derived from funded property alone, was nearly £300 a-year; but his habits were close, thrifty, almost miserly. His personal appearance was neat and gentlemanly, but he kept no servant. A charwoman came once a-day to arrange his chamber and perform other household work, and he usually dined, very simply, at a coffee-house or tavern. His house, with the exception of a sitting and bed-room, was occupied by lodgers; amongst these was a pale, weakly-looking young man, of the name of Irwin. He was suffering from pulmonary consumption—a disease induced, I was informed, by his careless folly in remaining in his wet clothes after having assisted, during the greater part of the night, at a large fire at a coach-factory. His trade was in gold and silver lace-work—bullion for epaulettes, and so on; and as he had a good connection with several West-end establishments, his business appeared to be a thriving one; so much so, that he usually employed several assistants of both sexes. He occupied the first-floor, and a workshop at the end of the garden. His wife, a pretty-featured, well-formed, graceful young woman, of not more than two or three and twenty, was, they told me, the daughter of a schoolmaster, and certainly had been gentle and carefully nurtured. They had one child, a

sprightly, curly-haired, bright-eyed boy, nearly four years old. The wife, Ellen Irwin, was reputed to be a first-rate hand at some of the lighter parts of her husband's business; and her efforts to lighten his toil, and compensate by increased exertion for his daily diminishing capacity for labour, were unwearying and incessant. Never have I seen a more gentle, thoughtful tenderness than was displayed by that young wife towards her suffering, and sometimes not quite evenly-tempered, partner, who, however, let me add, appeared to reciprocate truthfully her affection; all the more so, perhaps, that he knew their time together upon earth had already shrunk to a brief span. In my opinion, Ellen Irwin was a handsome, even an elegant, young person; this, however, is in some degree a matter of taste. But no one could deny that the gentle kindness, the beaming compassion, that irradiated her features as she tended the fast-sinking invalid, rendered her at such times absolutely beautiful—*angelised* her, to use an expression of my wife's, with whom she was a prime favourite. I was self-debating for about the twentieth time one evening, where it was I had formerly seen her, with that sad, mournful look of hers; for seen her I was sure I had, and not long since either. It was late; I had just returned home; my wife was in the sick-room, and I entered it with two or three oranges. "Oh, now I remember," I suddenly exclaimed, just above my breath; "the picture in Mr. Renshawe's room! What a remarkable coincidence!"

A low, chuckling laugh, close at my elbow, caused me to turn quickly towards the door. Just within the threshold stood Mr. Renshawe, looking like a white stone image rather than a living man, but for the fierce sparkling of his strangely-gleaming eyes, and the mocking, triumphant curl of his lips. "You, too, have at last observed it, then?" he muttered, faintly echoing the under-tone in which I spoke: "I have known the truth for many weeks." The manner, the expression, not the words, quite startled me. At the same moment a cry of women rang through the room, and I immediately seized Mr. Renshawe by the arm, and drew him forcibly away, for there was that in his countenance which should not meet the eyes of a dying man.

"What were you saying? What truth have you known for weeks?" I asked, as soon as we had reached his sitting-room.

Before he could answer, another wailing sound ascended from the sick room. Lightning leaped from Renshawe's lustrous, dilated eyes, and the exulting laugh again, but louder, burst from his lips: "Ha! ha!" he fiercely exclaimed. "I know that cry! It is Death's!—Death's! Thrice-blessed death, whom I have so often ignorantly cursed! But that," he added quickly, and peering sharply in my face, "was when, as you know, people said"—and he ground his teeth with rage—"people said I was crazed—mad!"

"What can you mean by this wild talk, my friend?" I replied, in as unconcerned and quieting a tone as I could immediately assume. "Come, sit down: I was asking the meaning of your strange words below, just now?"

"The meaning of my words? You know as well as I do. Look there!"

"At the painting? Well?"

"You have seen the original," he went on with the same excited tone and gestures. "It crossed me like a flash of lightning. Still, it is strange she does not know me. It is sure she does not! But I am changed, no doubt—sadly changed!" he added, dejectedly, as he looked in a mirror.

"Can you mean that I have seen Laura Hargreaves here?" I stammered, thoroughly bewildered. "She who was drowned ten or eleven years ago?"

"To be sure—to be sure! It was so believed, I admit, by everybody—by myself, and the belief drove me mad! And yet, I now remember, when at times I was calm—when the pale face, blind staring eyes, and dripping hair, ceased for awhile to pursue and haunt me, the low, sweet voice and gentle face came back, and I knew she lived, though all denied it. But look, it is her very image!" he added fiercely, his glaring eyes flashing from the portrait to my face alternately.

"Whose image?"

"Whose image!—Why, Mrs. Irwin's, to be sure. You yourself admitted it just now." I was so confounded, that for several minutes I remained stupidly and silently staring at the man. At length I said, "Well, there is a likeness, though not so great as I imagined"——

"It is false!" he broke in furiously. "It is her very self."

"We'll talk of that to-morrow. You are ill, over-excited, and must go to bed. I hear Dr. Garland's voice below; he shall come to you."

"No—no—no!" he almost screamed. "Send me no doctors; I hate doctors! But I'll go to bed—since—you wish it; but no doctors! Not for the world!" As he spoke, he shrank coweringly backwards, out of the room; his wavering, unquiet eyes fixed upon mine as long as we remained within view of each other; a moment afterwards, I heard him dart into his chamber, and bolt and double-lock the door.

It was plain that lunacy, but partially subsided, had resumed its former mastery over the unfortunate gentleman. But what an extraordinary delusion! I took a candle, and examined the picture with renewed curiosity. It certainly bore a strong resemblance to Mrs. Irwin: the brown, curling hair, the pensive eyes, the pale fairness of complexion, were the same; but it was scarcely more girlish, more youthful, than the young matron was now, and the original, had she lived, would have been by this time approaching to thirty years of age! I went softly down-stairs and found, as I feared, that George Irwin was gone. My wife came weeping out of the death-chamber, accompanied by Dr. Garland, to whom I forthwith related what had just taken place. He listened with attention and interest; and after some sage observations upon the strange fancies which now and then take possession of the minds of monomaniacs, agreed to see Mr. Renshawe at ten the next morning. I was not required upon duty till eleven; and if it were in the physician's opinion desirable, I was to write at once to the patient's uncle, Mr. Oxley.

Mr. Renshawe was, I heard, stirring before seven o'clock, and the charwoman informed me that he had taken his breakfast as usual, and appeared to be in cheerful, almost high, spirits. The physician was punctual; I tapped at the sitting-room door, and was desired to come in. Mr. Renshawe was seated at a table with some papers before him, evidently determined to appear cool and indifferent. He could not, however, repress a start of surprise, almost of terror, at the sight of the physician, and a paleness, followed by a hectic flush, passed quickly over his countenance. I observed, too, that the portrait was turned with its face towards the wall.

By a strong effort, Mr. Renshawe regained his simulated composure, and in reply to Dr. Garland's professional inquiry, as to the state of his health, said, with a forced laugh: "My friend Waters has, I suppose, been amusing you with the absurd story that made him stare so last night. It is exceedingly droll, I must say, although many persons, otherwise acute enough, cannot, except upon reflection, comprehend a jest. There was John Kemble, the tragedian, for instance, who"—

"Never mind John Kemble, my dear sir," interrupted Dr. Garland, "Do, pray, tell us the story over again. I love an amusing jest."

Mr. Renshawe hesitated for an instant, and then said with reserve, almost dignity of manner: "I do not know, sir"—his face, by the way, determinedly averted from the cool, searching gaze of the physician—"I do not know, sir, that I am obliged to find you in amusement; and as your presence here was not invited, I shall be obliged by your leaving the room as quickly as may be."

"Certainly—certainly, sir. I am exceedingly sorry to have intruded, but I am sure you will permit me to have a peep at this wonderful portrait."

Renshawe sprang impulsively forward to prevent the doctor reaching it. He was too late; and Dr. Garland, turning sharply round with the painting in his hand, literally transfixed him in an attitude of surprise and consternation. Like the Ancient Mariner, he held him by his glittering eye, but the spell was not an enduring one. "Truly," remarked Dr. Garland, as he found the kind of mesmeric influence he had exerted beginning to fail, "not so *very* bad a chance resemblance; especially about the eyes and mouth"—

"This is very extraordinary conduct," broke in Mr. Renshawe: "and I must again request that you will both leave the room."

It was useless to persist, and we almost immediately went away. "Your impression, Mr. Waters," said the physician as he was leaving the house, "is, I dare say, the true one; but he is on his guard now, and it will be prudent to wait for a fresh outbreak before acting decisively; more especially as the hallucination appears to be quite a harmless one."

This was not, I thought, quite so sure, but of course I acquiesced, as in duty bound; and matters went on pretty much as usual for seven or eight weeks, except that Mr. Renshawe manifested much aversion towards myself personally, and at last served me with a written notice to quit at the end of the term previously stipulated for. There was still some time to that; and, in the meanwhile, I caused a strict watch to be set, as far as was practicable without exciting observation, upon our landlord's words and acts.

Ellen Irwin's first tumult of grief subsided, the next and pressing question related to her own and infant son's subsistence. An elderly man of the name of Tomlins was engaged as foreman; and it was hoped the business might still be carried on with sufficient profit. Mr. Renshawe's manner, though at times indicative of considerable nervous irritability, was kind and respectful to the young widow; and I began to hope that the delusion he had for awhile laboured under had finally passed away.

The hope was a fallacious one. We were sitting at tea on a Sunday evening, when Mrs. Irwin, pale and trembling with fright and nervous agitation, came hastily in with her little boy in her hand. I correctly divined what had occurred. In reply to my hurried questioning, the astounded young matron told me in substance, that within the last two or three days Mr. Renshawe's strange behaviour and disjointed talk had both bewildered and alarmed her. He vaguely intimated that she, Ellen Irwin, was really Laura somebody else—that she had kept company with him, Mr. Renshawe, in Yorkshire, before she knew poor George—with many other strange things he muttered rather than spoke out; and especially that it was owing to her son reminding her continually of his father, that she pretended not to have known Mr. Renshawe twelve or thirteen years ago. "In short," added the young woman, with tears and blushes, "he is utterly crazed; for he asked me just now to marry him—which I would not do for the Indies—and is gone away in a passion to find a paper that will prove, he says, I am that other Laura something."

There was something so ludicrous in all this, however vexatious and insulting under the circumstances—the recent death



of the husband, and the young widow's unprotected state—that neither of us could forbear laughing at the conclusion of Mrs. Irwin's story. It struck me, too, that Renshawe had conceived a real and ardent passion for the very comely and interesting person before us—first prompted, no doubt, by her accidental likeness to the portrait; and that some mental flaw or other caused him to confound her with the Laura who had in early life excited the same emotion in his mind.

Laughable as the matter was in one sense, there was—and the fair widow had noticed it as well as myself—a serious, menacing expression in the man's eye not to be trifled with; and at her earnest request, we accompanied her to her own apartment, to which Renshawe had threatened soon to return. We had not been a minute in the room, when his hurried step was heard approaching, and Mrs. Waters and I stepped hastily into an adjoining closet, where we could hear and partly see all that passed. Renshawe's speech trembled with fervency and anger as he broke at once into the subject with which his disordered brain was reeling.

"You will not dare to say, will you, that you do not remember this song—that these pencil-marks in the margin were not made by you thirteen years ago?" he menacingly ejaculated.

"I know nothing about the song, Mr. Renshawe," rejoined the young woman with more spirit than she might have exhibited but for my near presence. "It is really such nonsense. Thirteen years ago I was only about nine years of age."

"You persist, then, unfeeling woman, in this cruel deception! After all, too, that I have suffered: the days of gloom, the nights of horror, since that fearful moment when I beheld you dragged, a lifeless corpse, from the water, and they told me you were dead!"

"Dead! Gracious goodness, Mr. Renshawe, don't go on in this shocking way! I was never dragged out of a pond, nor supposed to be dead—never! You quite frighten one."

"Then you and I, your sister, and that thrice-accursed Bedford, did not, on the 7th of August, 1821, go for a sail on the piece of water at Lowfield, and the skiff was not, in the deadly, sudden, jealous strife between him and me, accidentally upset?"

But I know how it is : it is this brat, and the memories he recalls, that "——

Mrs. Irwin screamed, and I stepped sharply into the room. The grasp of the lunatic was on the child's throat. I loosed it somewhat roughly, throwing him off with a force that brought him to the ground. He rose quickly, glared at me with tiger-like ferocity, and then darted out of the room. The affair had become serious, and the same night I posted a letter to Yorkshire, informing Mr. Oxley of what had occurred, and suggesting the propriety of his immediately coming to London. Measures were also taken for securing Mrs. Irwin and her son from molestation.

But the cunning of lunacy is not easily baffled. On returning home the fourth evening after the dispatch of my letter, I found the house and immediate neighbourhood in the wildest confusion. My own wife was in hysterics ; Mrs. Irwin, I was told by half-a-dozen tongues at once, was dying ; and the frightful cause of all was, that little George Irwin, a favourite with everybody, had in some unaccountable manner fallen into the river Lea, and been drowned. This, at least, was the general conviction, although the river had been dragged to no purpose—the poor child's black beaver hat and feather having been discovered floated to the bank, a considerable way down the stream. The body, it was thought, had been carried out into the Thames by the force of the current.

A terrible suspicion glanced across my mind. "Where is Mr. Renshawe?" I asked. Nobody knew. He had not been seen since five o'clock—about the time, I soon ascertained, that the child was missed. I had the house cleared, as quickly as possible, of the numerous gossips that crowded it, and then sought a conference with Dr. Garland, who was with Mrs. Irwin. The distracted mother had, I found, been profusely bled and cupped, and it was hoped that brain-fever, which had been apprehended, would not ensue. The physician's suspicions pointed the same way as mine ; but he declined committing himself to any advice, and I was left to act according to my own discretion. I was new to such matters at that time—unfortunately so, as it proved, or the affair might have had a less painful issue.

Tomlins and I remained up, waiting for the return of Mr. Renshawe; and as the long, slow hours limped past, the night-silence only broken by the dull moaning, and occasional spasmodic screams of poor Mrs. Irwin, I grew very much excited. The prolonged absence of Mr. Renshawe confirmed my impressions of his guilt, and I determined to tax him with it, and take him into custody the instant he appeared. It was two in the morning before he did so; and the nervous fumbling for full ten minutes, with his latch-key, before he could open the door, quite prepared me for the spectral-like aspect he presented on entering. He had met somebody, it afterwards appeared, outside, who had assured him that the mother of the drowned child was either dead or dying. He never drank, I knew, but he staggered as if intoxicated; and after he had with difficulty reached the head of the stairs, in reply to my question as to where he had been, he could only stutter with white, trembling lips: "It—it—cannot be—be true—that Lau—that Mrs. Irwin is—dying?"

"Quite true, Mr. Renshawe," I very imprudently replied, and in much too loud a tone, for we were but a few paces from Mrs. Irwin's bed-room door. "And if, as I suspect, the child has been drowned by you, you will have before long two murders on your head."

A choking, bubbling noise came from the wretched man's throat, and his shaking fingers vainly strove to loosen his neck-tie. At the same moment, I heard a noise, as of struggling, in the bed-room, and the nurse's voice in eager remonstrance. I instantly made a movement towards Mr. Renshawe, with a view to loosen his cravat—his features being frightfully convulsed, and to get him out of the way as quickly as possible, for I guessed what was about to happen—when he, mistaking my intention, started back, turned half round, and found himself confronted by Mrs. Irwin, her pale features and white night-dress dabbled with blood, in consequence of a partial disturbance of the bandages in struggling with the nurse—a terrifying, ghastly sight even to me; to him utterly overwhelming, and scarcely needing her frenzied execrations on the murderer of her child to deprive him utterly of all remaining sense and strength. He suddenly reeled, threw his arms wildly into the

air, and before I could stretch forth my hand to save him, fell heavily backwards from the edge of the steep stairs, where he was standing, to the bottom. Tomlins and I hastened to his assistance, lifted him up, and as we did so, a jet of blood gushed from his mouth; he had likewise received a terrible wound near the right temple, from which the life-stream issued copiously.

We got him to bed: Dr. Garland and a neighbouring surgeon were soon with us, and prompt remedies were applied. It was a fruitless labour. Day had scarcely dawned before we heard from the physician's lips that life with him was swiftly ebbing to its close. He was perfectly conscious and collected. Happily there was no stain of murder on his soul: he had merely enticed the child away, and placed him, under an ingenious pretence, with an acquaintance at Camden-Town; and by this time both he and his mother were standing, awe-struck and weeping, by Henry Renshawe's death-bed. He had thrown the child's hat into the river, and his motive in thus acting appeared to have been a double one. In the first place, because he thought the boy's likeness to his father was the chief obstacle to Mrs. Irwin's toleration of his addresses; and next, to bribe her into compliance by a promise to restore her son. But he could not be deemed accountable for his actions. "I think," he murmured brokenly, "that the delusion was partly self-cherished, or of the Evil One. I observed the likeness long before, but it was not till the—the husband was dying, that the idea fastened itself upon my aching brain, and grew there. But the world is passing: forgive me—Ellen—Laura——" He was dead!

The inquest on the cause of death returned, of course, that it was "accidental:" but I long regretted that I had not been less precipitate, though perhaps all was for the best—for the sufferer as well as others. Mr. Oxley had died some five weeks previously. This I found from Renshawe's will, where it was recited as a reason that, having no relative alive for whom he cared, his property was bequeathed to Guy's Hospital, charged with £100 a-year to Ellen Irwin, as long as she lived unmarried. The document was perfectly coherent; and, although written during the height of his monomania, contained not a word respecting the identity of the youthful widow and the Laura whose sad fate had first unsettled the testator's reason.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE PARTNER.

I HAD virtually, though not formally, left the force, when a young man, of gentlemanly but somewhat dissipated aspect, and looking very pale and agitated, called upon me with a note from one of the commissioners, enjoining me to assist the bearer, Mr. Edmund Webster, to the utmost of my ability, if, upon examination, I saw reason to place reliance upon his statement relative to the painful and extraordinary circumstances in which he was involved.

"Mr. Edmund Webster," I exclaimed, after glancing at the note. "You are the person, then, accused of robbing Mr. Hutton, the corn-merchant (the reader will, of course, understand that I make use of fictitious names), and whom that gentleman refuses to prosecute?"

"The same, Mr. Waters. But although the disgraceful charge, so far as regards legal pursuit, appears to be withdrawn, or rather is not pressed, I and my family shall not be the less shamed and ruined thereby, unless my perfect innocence can be made manifest before the world. It is with that view we have been advised to seek your assistance; and my father desires me to say that he will hesitate at no expense necessary for the thorough prosecution of the inquiry."

"Very well, Mr. Webster. The intimation of the commissioner is, however, of itself all-potent with me, although I hoped to be concerned in no more such investigations. Have the goodness, therefore, to sit down, and favour me minutely and distinctly with your version of the affair, omitting, if you please, no circumstance, however apparently trivial, in connection with it. I may tell you," I added, opening the note-book from which I am now transcribing, and placing it before me in readiness to

begin—"I may tell you, by way of some slight encouragement, that the defence you volunteered at the police-office was, in my opinion, too improbable to be an invention; and I, as you know, have had large experience in such matters. That also, I suspect, is Mr. Hutton's opinion; and hence not only his refusal to prosecute, but the expense and trouble he has been at, to my knowledge, in preventing either his own or your name from appearing in the papers. Now, sir, if you please."

"I shall relate every circumstance, Mr. Waters, as clearly and truthfully as possible, for my own sake, in order that you may not be working in the dark; and first, I must beg your attention to one or two family matters, essential to a thorough appreciation of the position in which I am placed."

"Go on, sir: it is my duty to hear all you have to say."

"My father," proceeded Mr. Edmund Webster, "who, as you are aware, resides in the Regent's Park, retired about five years ago from the business in Mark Lane, which has since been carried on by the former junior partner, Mr. Hutton. Till within the last six months, I believed myself destined for the army, the purchase-money of a cornetcy having been lodged at the Horse Guards a few days after I came of age. Suddenly, however, my father changed his mind, insisted that I should become a partner of Hutton's in the corn-trade, and forthwith withdrew the money lodged for the commission. I am not even yet cognizant of all his motives for this seeming caprice; but those he alleged were, first, my spendthrift, idle habits—an imputation for which, I confess, there was too much foundation; though as to whether the discipline of the counting-house would, as he believed, effect a beneficial change, there might be two opinions. Another, and, I have no doubt, much more powerfully inducing motive with him was, that I had formed an attachment for Miss Ellen Bramston, the second daughter of Captain Bramston, of the East India Company's service, residing at Hampstead upon his half-pay. My father strongly disapproved of the proposed alliance: like most of the successful City men I have known or heard of, he more heartily despises poverty with a laced coat on its back than in rags; and he knew no more effectual plan to be hit upon for frustrating my wishes, than by transforming my expected cornetcy into a

partnership in the corn-trade, my imaginary sword into an actual goose-quill ; Captain Bramston, who is distantly related to an earl, being even prouder than he is poor, and a man that would rather see his daughter in her coffin than married to a trader. 'It was condescension enough,' he angrily remarked, that he had permitted Ellen Bramston to encourage the addresses of the son of a City parvenu, but it was utterly preposterous to suppose she could wed an actual corn-chandler.'"

"Corn-chandler!"

"That was Captain Bramston's pleasant phrase, when I informed him of my father's sudden change of purpose. The proposed partnership was as distasteful to myself as to Captain Bramston ; but my father proved inexorable—fiercely so, I may say—to my entreaties, and those of my sisters ; and I was placed in the dilemma, either of immediate banishment from home, and probable forfeiture of my inheritance, or the loss of Ellen Bramston, to whom, with all my follies, I was and am devotedly attached. After much anxious cogitation, I hit upon a scheme, requiring for a time the exercise of a considerable amount of deceit and dissimulation, which would, I flattered myself, ultimately reconcile interest with inclination—give me Ellen, and not lose my father."

"To which deceit and dissimulation you are doubtless indebted for your present unfortunate position."

"You have rightly anticipated. But to proceed. Mr. Hutton, himself, I must tell you, was strongly adverse to receiving me as a partner, though for some reason or other he durst not openly oppose the project ; his son, John Hutton, also bitterly objected to it"—

"His son, John Hutton ! I know the character of Hutton senior pretty well ; pray what is that of his son ?"

"Well, like myself, he is rather fast perhaps, but not the less a good sort of young fellow enough. He sailed the week before last for Riga, on business."

"Before you were apprehended ?"

"On the morning of the same day. Let me see, where was I ? Oh—Mr. Hutton's aversion to the partnership, the knowledge of which suggested my plan of operation. I induced him to represent to my father that I should pass at least two or three

months in the counting-house before the matter was irreversibly concluded, for his, Mr. Hutton's sake, in order that it might be ascertained if there was any possibility of taming me into habits of method and application; and I hypocritically enforced his argument—you see I am perfectly candid—by promising ultimate dutiful submission to my father's wishes, provided the final decision were thus respite. The main object I thought to obtain by this apparent compliance was the effectual loosening, before many weeks had passed, of the old gentleman's purse-strings, which had of late been over-tightly drawn. I had several pressing debts of honour, as they are called—debts of dishonour would, according to my experience, be the apter phrase—which it was absolutely necessary to discharge; and the success, moreover, of my matrimonial project entirely depended upon my ability to secure a very considerable sum of money."

"Your matrimonial project?"

"Yes: it was at last arranged, not without much reluctance on the part of Ellen, but I have good reason for believing with the covert approbation of Captain Bramston, that we should effect a stolen marriage, immediately set off for the Continent, and remain there till the parental storm, which on my father's part would, I knew, be tremendous, had blown over. I did not feel much disquieted as to the final result. I was an only son; my sisters would be indefatigable intercessors; and we all, consequently, were pretty confident that a general reconciliation, such as usually accompanies the ringing down of the green curtain at the wind-up of a stage-comedy, would after no great interval of time take place. Money, however, was indispensable—money for wedding expenses, the flight to France, and living there for a considerable time perhaps; and no likelier mode of obtaining it occurred to me than that of cajoling my father into good humour, by affecting to acquiesce in his wishes. And here I may remark, in passing, that had I been capable of the infamous deed I am accused of, abundant opportunities of plundering Mr. Hutton presented themselves from the first hour I entered his counting-house. Over and over again has he left me alone in his private room, with the keys in the lock of his iron safe, where large sums were frequently deposited, not in bank-notes only, but untraceable gold."



"That looks like a singular want of caution in so precise and wary a man as Mr. Hutton," I remarked, half under my breath.

"Nothing of the sort," rejoined Mr. Edmund Webster with some heat, and his pallid face brightly flushing. "It only shows that, with all my faults and follies, it was impossible for any one that knew me to imagine I could be capable of perpetrating a felony."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Webster ; I meant nothing offensive to you : the remark was merely the partly involuntary expression of a thought which suddenly glanced across my mind."

"I have little more of preliminary detail to relate," he went on to say. "Contrary to our hope and expectation, my father became not a whit more liberal with his purse than before—the reverse rather ; and I soon found that he intended to keep the screw on till the accomplishment of the hated partnership placed an insuperable bar between me and Ellen Bramston. I used to converse frequently upon these matters with Mr. Hutton, as unreservedly as I do now with you ; and I must say that, although extremely anxious to avoid any appearance of opposition to my father, he always expressed the warmest sympathy with my aims and wishes ; so much so, in fact, that I at last ventured to ask him for the loan of about five hundred pounds, that being the least sum which would enable me to pay off the most pressing of the claims by which I was harassed, and carry out my wedding project. That favour, however, he flatly refused, under the plea that his having done so would sooner or later come to my father's knowledge."

"And did Mr. Hutton, after that refusal, continue to afford you opportunities of helping yourself, had you been so minded ?"

"Yes, unquestionably he did : but what of that ?" sharply replied the young man, his pale face again suffused with an angry flush.

"Nothing, sir ; nothing. Go on : I am all attention."

"Well, I made application to several money-lenders with the like ill-success, till last Monday fortnight, when I was accosted at Mr. Hutton's place of business in the Corn-market, where I happened to be for a few minutes alone, by a respectable-looking middle-aged man, who asked me if I was the Mr. Edmund

Webster who had left a note at Mr. Curtis's, of Bishopsgate Street, on the previous Saturday, requesting the loan of five hundred pounds, upon my own acceptance at six months' date. I eagerly replied in the affirmative; upon which Mr. Brown, as the man called himself, asked if I had the promissory-note for five hundred and fifty pounds, as I had proposed, ready drawn; as if so, he would give me the cash at once. I answered in a flurry of joyous excitement, that I had not the note drawn nor a stamp with me, but if he would wait a few minutes till Mr. Hutton or a clerk came in, I would get one and write the acceptance immediately. He hesitated for a moment, and then said: 'I am in a hurry this morning, but I will wait for you in the coffee-room of the Bay-tree Tavern: have the kindness to be as quick as you can, and draw the note in favour of Mr. Brown.' He had not been gone above three or four minutes, when a clerk came in. I instantly hurried to a stationer's, wrote the note in his shop, and speeded on with it to the Bay-tree Tavern. The coffee-room was full, except the box where sat Mr. Brown, who, after glancing at the acceptance, and putting it quickly up, placed a roll of notes in my hand. 'Do not display your money,' he said, 'before all these people. You can count the notes under the table.' I did so: they were quite correct—ten fifties; and I forthwith ordered a bottle of wine. Mr. Brown, however, alleging business as an excuse, did not wait till it was brought—bade me good-day, and disappeared, taking, in his hurry, my hat instead of his own.

"I was, you will readily believe, exceedingly jubilant at this lucky turn of affairs; and, strange as it must appear to you, and does now to myself, it did not strike me at the time as at all extraordinary or unbusinesslike, that I should have five hundred pounds suddenly placed in my hands by a man to whom I was personally unknown, and who could not, therefore, be certain that I was the Edmund Webster he professed to be in search of. What with the effect of the wine I drank and natural exultation, I was, I well remember, in a state of great excitement when I left the tavern, and hardly seemed to feel my feet as I hurried away to Mark Lane to inform Mr. Hutton of my good-luck, and bid his counting-house and the corn-trade a final farewell. He was not at home, and I went in and seated my-

self in his private room to await his return. I have no doubt that, as the clerk has since deposed, I *did* look flustered, agitated; and it is quite true also, that, after vainly waiting for upwards of an hour, I suddenly left the place, and, as it happened, unnoticed by anybody. Immediately upon leaving Mark Lane I hastened to Hampstead, saw Miss Bramston; and as everything, with the exception of the money, had been for some time in readiness, it was soon decided that we should take wing at dawn on the following morning for Scotland, and thence pass over to France. I next betook myself to Regent's Park, where I dined, and confided everything to my sisters except as to *how* I had obtained the necessary funds. At about eight in the evening, I took a cab as far as the Haymarket, for the purpose of hiring a post-chaise-and-four, and of paying a few debts of honour in that neighbourhood. I was personally unknown to the post-master; it was therefore necessary to pre-pay the chaise as far as St. Alban's, and I presented him with one of the fifty-pound notes for that purpose. He did not appear surprised at the largeness of the sum, but requested me to place my name and address at the back of the note before he changed it. In my absurd anxiety to prevent the possibility of our flight being traced, I indorsed the note as 'Charles Hart, Great Wimpole Street,' and the man left the yard.

"He was gone a considerable time, and I was getting exceedingly impatient, when, to my surprise and consternation, he re-entered the yard accompanied by a police-officer. 'You are the gentleman from whom Mr. Evans received this fifty-pound note a few minutes ago—are you not?' 'Yes, to be sure,' I answered, stammering and colouring, why I scarcely knew. 'Then step this way if you please,' said the man. 'That note, with nine others of the same value, is advertised in the evening papers as having been stolen from a gentleman's counting-house in Mark Lane.' I thought I should have fainted; and when a paragraph in the *Globe* was pointed out to me, offering a reward, on the part of Mr. Hutton, for the apprehension of the person or persons who had that day stolen ten fifty-pound Bank of England notes—the dates and numbers of which were given—from his office, I was so completely stunned, that but for the police-officer I should have dropped upon the floor. 'This, perhaps,

may be cleared up,' said the officer, 'so far as you, Mr. Hart, are concerned; and I will, if you like, go with you at once to your address in Great Wimpole Street.' It was of course necessary to acknowledge that my name was not Hart, and that I had given a false address. This was enough. I was at once secured and taken off to the station-house, searched, and the other nine notes being found upon me, no doubt was entertained of my guilt. I obstinately declined giving my real name—very foolishly so, as I now perceive, since Mr. Hutton's clerk, the moment he saw me the next day at the police-court, disclosed it as a matter of course. The result you know. Mr. Hutton, when he heard *who* it was that had been taken into custody, kept resolutely out of the way; and, after several remands, I was set at liberty, the magistrate remarking, that he knew of no case which showed, in a more striking light, the need of a public prosecutor in this country. My account of the way in which I became possessed of the notes was, as you know, scouted, and quite naturally; Mr. Curtis, of Bishopsgate Street, having denied all knowledge of Mr. Brown, or that he had commissioned any one to present me with five hundred pounds in exchange for my acceptance. Thus stigmatised and disgraced, I returned home to find my father struck down, in what was at first thought would prove mortal illness, by the blow—Captain Bramston's door shut against me—and the settled marriage of my eldest sister, Jane, with an amiable young man, peremptorily broken off by his relatives, on account of the assumed criminality of her brother."

"This is indeed a sad, mysterious business, Mr. Webster," I remarked, when the young man had ceased speaking; "but pray tell me, did either Mr. Hutton or his son know of your application to Mr. Curtis?"

"I cannot say that either of them did, though it is more than probable that I mentioned it to both of them."

"Well, Mr. Webster, I have confidence in your veracity; but it is essential that I should see your father before engaging in this business."

"He is anxious you should do so, and as early as possible."

It was then arranged that I should call on Webster, senior, at three o'clock the same afternoon, and announce myself to the

servants as Mr. Thompson. I was punctual to the time appointed, and was forthwith ushered by one of the daughters into her father's presence. He was not yet sufficiently recovered to leave his bed; and I had hardly exchanged half-a-dozen sentences with him, when the same young lady by whom I had been introduced hastily returned to say Mr. Hutton was below, and requested an immediate interview. Mr. Webster bade his daughter tell Mr. Hutton he was engaged, and could not be interrupted; and she was turning away to do so, when I said hastily, "Excuse me, Mr. Webster, but I should exceedingly like to hear with my own ears what Mr. Hutton has to say, unobserved by him."

"You may do so with all my heart," he replied; "but how shall we manage to conceal you?"

"Easily enough—under the bed;" and suiting the action to the word, I was in a moment out of sight. Miss Webster was then told to ask Mr. Hutton to walk up, and in a few minutes that worthy gentleman entered the room. After a few hypocritical condolences upon the invalid's state of health, Mr. Hutton came to the point at once, and with a vengeance.

"I am come, Mr. Webster," he began in a determined tone, "to say that I will endure this shilly-shallying no longer. Either you give up the bonds you hold of mine, for borrowed moneys"—

"Eleven thousand pounds and upwards!" groaned the sick man.

"About that sum, I am aware, including interest; in discharge of which load of debt I was, you know, to have given a third share of my business to your admirable son. Well, agree at once to cancel those bonds, or I forthwith prosecute your son, who will as certainly be convicted, and transported for life."

"I tell you again," retorted the excited invalid, "that I will not purchase mere forbearance to prosecute at the cost of a single shilling. The accusation would always be hanging over his head, and we should remain for ever disgraced, as we are now, in the eyes of the world."

"I have turned that over in my mind," replied Hutton, "and I think I can meet your wishes. Undertake to cancel the debt I

owe you, and I will wait publicly to-morrow upon the magistrate with a letter in my hand purporting to be from my son, and stating that it was he who took the notes from my desk, and employed a man of the name of Brown to exchange them for your son's acceptance, he being anxious that Mr. Edmund Webster should not become his father's partner; a purpose that would necessarily be frustrated, if he, Edmund Webster, was enabled to marry and leave this country."

There was no answer to this audacious proposal for a minute or two, and then Mr. Webster said slowly, "That my son is innocent, I am thoroughly convinced—"

"Innocent!" exclaimed Mr. Hutton, with savage derision. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Still," continued the invalid, unmindful of the interruption, "it might be impossible to prove him so; and your proposition has a certain plausibility about it. I must, however, have time to consider of it."

"Certainly; let us say till this day week. You cannot choose but comply; for if you do not, as certainly as I stand here a living man, your son shall, immediately after the expiration of that time, be on the high road to the hulks." Having said this, Mr. Hutton went away, and I emerged from my very undignified lurking-place.

"I begin to see a little clearer through this black affair," I said in reply to the old gentleman's questioning look; "and I trust that we may yet be able to turn the tables upon the very confident gentleman who has just left us. Now, if you please," I added, addressing Miss Webster, who had again returned, "I shall be glad of a few moments' conversation with your brother." She led the way down-stairs, and I found Mr. Edmund Webster in the dining-room. "Have the kindness," I said, "to let me see the hat Mr. Brown left behind at the tavern in exchange for yours." The young man seemed surprised at the apparent oddness of the request, but immediately complied with it. "And pray what maker or seller's name was pasted inside the crown of *your* hat, Mr. Webster?"

"Lewis, of Bond Street," he replied; "I always purchase my hats there."

"Very good. And now as to Mr. Brown's personal appearance. What is he at all like?"

"A stoutish, middle-aged man, with very light hair, prominent nose, and a pale face, considerably pock-marked."

"That will do for the present, Mr. Webster; and let me beg, that, till you see me again, not a soul receives a hint that we are moving in this business."

I then left the house. The hat had furnished an important piece of information, the printed label inside being, "Perkins, Guildford, Surrey!" and at the Rose and Crown Inn, Guildford, Surrey, I alighted the very next day at about two o'clock, in the strong hope of meeting in its steep streets or adjacent lanes with a stoutish gentleman, distinguished by very light hair, a long nose, and a white pock-marked face. The chance was, at all events, worth a trial; and I very diligently set to work to realise it, by walking about from dawn till dark, peering at every head I passed, and spending the evenings in the most frequented parlours of the town. Many a bootless chase I was led by a distant glimpse of light or red hair; and one fellow with a sandy poll, and a pair of the longest legs I ever saw, kept me almost at a run for two mortal hours one sultry hot morning, on the road to Chertsey, before I headed him, and confronted a pair of fat cheeks, as round and red as an apple, between which lay, scarcely visible, a short, snub-nose. Patience and perseverance at length, however, met with their reward. I recognised my man as he was cheapening a piece of meat in the market-place. He answered precisely to the description given me, and wore, moreover, a fashionable hat, strongly suggestive of Bond Street. After awhile he parted from his wife, and made towards a public-house, into the parlour of which I entered close after him. I had now leisure to observe him more closely. He appeared to be a respectable sort of man, but a careworn expression flitted at times over his face, which to me, an adept in such signs, indicated with sufficient plainness much anxiety of mind, arising, probably from pecuniary embarrassment, not, I judged, from a burdened conscience. I presently obtained further and decisive proof, though that was scarcely needed, that Mr. Skinner, as the waiter called him, was my Mr. Brown: in rising to leave the room, I took his hat, which he had hung

up, in apparent mistake for my own, and in the half-minute that elapsed before I replaced it, saw plainly enough, "Lewis, Bond Street, London," on the inside label. The only question now was, how to best avail myself of the lucky turning up of Mr. Brown; and whilst I was meditating some modes of action, the sight of a board, upon which was painted, "This ground to be let on Building Leases: Apply to Mr. Skinner, Builder," at once decided me. I called upon Mr. Skinner, who lived about half a mile out of Guildford, the next morning, inquired as to the condition of the said leases, walked with him over the ground in question, calculated together how much a handsome country-house would cost, and finally adjourned to the Rose and Crown to discuss the matter further over a bottle of wine. Skinner was as free a soul, I found, as ever liquor betrayed into indiscretion: and I soon heard that he had lately been to London, and had a rich brother-in-law there of the name of Hutton, with other less interesting particulars. This charming confidence, he seemed to think, required a return in kind, and after he had essayed half-a-dozen indirect questions, I came frankly out with, "There's no occasion to beat about the bush, Mr. Skinner; you wish to know who I am, and especially if I am able to pay for the fine house we have been talking of. Well then, I am a money-dealer; I lend cash, sometimes, on security."

"A pawnbroker?" queried Mr. Skinner, doubtfully.

"Not exactly that; I oftener take persons in pledge than goods. What I mean by money-dealer, is a man who discounts the signatures of fast men with good expectations, who don't mind paying handsomely in the end for present accommodation."

"I understand—a bill-discounter?"

"Precisely. But come, drink, and pass the decanter."

A gleam that shot out of the man's gray eyes strengthened a hope that I had hardly dared entertain, that I was on the eve of a great success; but the trout, it was clear, required to be cautiously played. Mr. Skinner presently fell into a brown study, which I did not interrupt, contenting myself with refilling his glass as fast as he mechanically emptied it. "A bill-discounter," said he at last, putting down his pipe, and turning towards me



with a settled purpose in his look. "Is amount and length of time to run of any consequence?"

"None whatever, if the parties are safe."

"Cash down on the nail?"

"Cash down on the nail, *minus*, of course, the interest."

"Of course. Well, then, Mr. Thompson, I have a promissory-note signed by Mr. Edmund Webster, of London, for five hundred and fifty pounds, at six months' date, which I should like to discount."

"Webster, of the Minorities?"

"No; his father is a retired corn-merchant, residing in the Regent's Park. The bill's as safe as a Bank-of-England note."

"I know the party. But why doesn't the rich brother-in-law you spoke of cash it for you?"

"Well," replied Skinner, "no doubt he would; but the fact is, there is a dispute between us about this very note. I owe him a goodish bit of money; and if he got it into his hands, he'd of course be for deducting the amount; and I've been obliged to put him off by pretending it was accidentally burned soon after I obtained it."

"A queer story, my friend; but if the signature's genuine, I don't mind that, and you shall have the cash at once."

"Here it is, then," said Skinner, unclasping a stout leather pocket-book. "I don't mind throwing back the odd fifty pounds."

I eagerly grasped the precious document, glanced at it, saw it was all right, placed it in my pocket, and then suddenly changing my tone, and rising from the table, said: "Now then, Skinner, *alias* Brown, I have to inform you that I am a detective police-officer, and that you are my prisoner."

"Police! prisoner!" shouted the astounded man, as he leaped to his feet; "what are you talking of?"

"I will tell you. Your brother-in-law employed you to discount the note now in my possession. You did so, pretending to be a Mr. Brown, the agent of a Mr. Curtis; but the villainous sequel of the transaction—the charging young Mr. Webster with having stolen the very fifty-pound notes you gave him in the coffee-room of the Bay-tree Tavern—I do not believe,

thanks to Master Hutton's success in suppressing the names in the public reports, you can be aware of."

The bewildered man shook as with ague in every limb, and when I ceased speaking, protested earnestly that he had had no evil design in complying with his brother-in-law's wishes.

"I am willing to think so," I replied; "but, at all events, you must go with me to London—quietly were best."

To this he, at last, though very reluctantly, consented; and half an hour afterwards we were in the train, and on our road to London.

The next morning, Mr. Webster's solicitors applied to Mr. Hutton for the immediate liquidation of the bonds held by their client. This, as we had calculated, rendered him furious; and Edmund Webster was again arrested on the former charge, and taken to the Marlborough Street Police-office, where his father, Captain Bramston, and other friends, impatiently awaited his appearance. Mr. Hutton this time appeared as prosecutor, and deposed to the safe custody of the notes on the morning of the robbery.

"And you swear," said Mr. Webster's solicitor, "that you did not with your own hands give the pretendedly stolen notes to Brown, and request him to take them in Mr. Curtis's name to young Mr. Webster?"

Hutton, greatly startled, glanced keenly in the questioner's face, and did not immediately answer. "No, I did not," he at last replied, in a low, shaking voice.

"Let me refresh your memory. Did you not say to Brown, or rather Skinner, your brother-in-law—"

A slight scream escaped the quivering lips of the detected conspirator, and a blaze of frenzied anguish and alarm swept over his countenance, leaving it as white as marble. No further answer could be obtained from him; and as soon as possible he left the office, followed by the groans and hisses of the excited auditory. Skinner was then brought forward; he made a full and ample confession, and Edmund Webster was at once discharged, amidst the warm felicitations of the magistrate and the uproarious gratulations of his friends. It was intended to indict Mr. Hutton for perjury; but the unhappy man chose to appear before a higher tribunal than that of the Old Bailey. He

was found dead in his bedroom early the next morning. His affairs were found to be in a state of insolvency, though the deficit was not large ; 15*s.* in the pound having been, I understood, ultimately paid to the creditors. Miss Ellen Bramston, I must not in conclusion omit to state, became Mrs. Edmund Webster shortly after the triumphant vindication of her lover's character ; and, I believe, Miss Webster was made a wife on the same day.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE CONSPIRACY.

THE repudiated or unacknowledged claims upon the British Government, some of them for fabulous sums, amount to a respectable national debt, and scores of individuals fall into poverty and untimely graves, in vain pursuit of a glittering bubble, ever dancing before their eyes, and ever just—only just—beyond their reach. The advent of a new First Lord of the Treasury is the signal of a general revival from uneasy slumber of demands, which, shamefully ignored or neglected by his predecessor in office, will, write the unteachable solicitors, “be sure to meet with due appreciation from the distinguished statesman to whom the favour of a gracious sovereign and the sufferages of an enlightened people have entrusted the honour and interests of the great British nation—which honour and interests can never be more effectually promoted than by doing justice to the meanest alike with the mightiest of that sovereign’s subjects.” It is surprising, too, or at least it would be surprising to those who do not from experience know how slight a thread of coloured cob-web will retain persons otherwise sane in the consuming idleness, gradually changing to equally idle despair, of the fool’s paradise of visionary hope—to observe upon how slight and fanciful a foundation they continue to erect their air-drawn castles. I once knew a mathematician, of all men in the world, whom the following merely formal note uplifted to the seventh heaven from out of the slough of despond into which he was fast sinking with some hope on his friends’ part that he would at last touch the bottom, and rebound therefrom by his own latent energy into the clear and healthful atmosphere of genuine working-day life :—

“Whitehall,

“I am directed by Lord Melbourne to acknowledge the receipt of your memorial and accompanying vouchers, and to state that the matter shall receive his earliest attention.”

In less than six months afterwards the mathematician was a confirmed lunatic! Since I left the police force I have been more familiar with these hallucinations, and it happened that once whilst therein, I was brought, in the exercise of my vocation, in contact with one of the most importunate, inexorable of the “ghosts” by which the halls and passages of the Treasury and other public offices are constantly haunted; an intimacy which, it will be seen, led to curious revelations and results.

This person, one Alexander Tyrell, was about thirty years of age, and had inherited, two or three years before I made official acquaintance with him, about eight hundred pounds in cash, and a claim upon the English Treasury for the same number of thousands, from his father, which claim, as far as I could or cared to understand the bill of particulars—set forth in the bundle of documents exteriorly known, at all events, to every clerk and messenger at the Treasury, and by them facetiously denominated “The Kelp Papers,” was for losses sustained by Tyrell, senior, a manufacturer of kelp from sea-weed, on the coast of Kent, who, at the suggestion or command of Sir John Moor, during the alarm previous to Trafalgar of French invasion, gave up his premises, buildings, &c., for the use and occupation of the troops assembled there; incurring thereby the destruction of an immense quantity of partially-prepared kelp, and the ruin of his business. Tyrell’s father died in 1830, just as he was more sanguine of success than he had at any time been during the previous five-and-twenty years, in consequence of Earl Grey’s succession to office, and the bequest of a thousand pounds, by a distant relative, enabling him to press the siege at the Treasury with greater vigour than ever. Death, albeit, always unwelcome, and never more so than when the hand grasps, or its owner fancies it is about to grasp, the prize of a life’s exertion, suddenly interposed at the critical moment, his coming having probably been hastened by the agitation into which the change of ministry and the unanticipated legacy threw the old

man's care-cankered mind and body; and his only son, Alexander, found himself, after his father's debts and funeral charges had been paid, in possession of eight hundred pounds in money, and a bill for eight thousand, drawn upon but not accepted by the British Government. Now Alexander Tyrell was a young man of compressed but naturally elastic genius, who, thus suddenly liberated from parental control and the much sterner grip of poverty, forthwith expanded into a swell of first-rate brilliancy; and carried on the war with such spirit, that at the end of less than two years, he found, upon a rough calculation, hurriedly gone into, after awakening one morning in the custody of a sheriff's officer, that he was worth about twenty pounds in cash, after relieving himself of the said officer, wherewith to face about two thousand pounds of debt! Thus beset, Alexander Tyrell bethought himself of his important claim upon the National Exchequer; and the Treasury clerks, who had congratulated themselves upon the death of "Old Kelp," were surprised and disgusted by the apparition of Kelp the younger, who moreover quickly manifested a combative persistence in his purpose, which the rudest rebuff, the most supercilious insolence, utterly failed to repress or mitigate. More than that, the obstinate claimant of eight thousand pounds, which he assured them "was a vital necessity of his cruel and unexampled position," began at last to assume, concurrently with the cultivation of his moustache, an air of occult menace, darkly interpreted by warning hints at the risks incurred by official personages, who systematically perverted or dammed up the fountain of justice. Matter for merriment this to any one moderately skilled in physiognomy that had once seen his good-looking, good-humoured, knavish face, wherein braggart was written plainly enough, but of courage, moral or physical, not the faintest sign. Whether, however, from fear or fussiness, one of the officials, choosing to treat the affair seriously, had Alexander Tyrell taken before a magistrate, by whom he was bound over to keep the peace towards all the king's lieges, and notably the British Government and its employés, an undertaking which the terrified young man gave with a firm resolution, I am quite sure, not to break it. He was not, however, forbidden to strut solemnly past the office doors as the clerks were arriving

or leaving, and glare at them with all the Byronic-satanism he could force into his weak light-hazel eyes—a pastime which, in conjunction with a continuous succession of anonymous letters, written in a woman's hand, but it was not doubted dictated by him, and addressed to the Lords and Secretary of the Treasury, caused an intimation to be given to the authorities of Scotland Yard, that it would be well to keep a sharp eye upon Alexander Tyrell's movements, and the more heedfully, that it was reported he had connected himself with the Chartist politicians who were agitating the country. I was selected for this service, and of course entered upon it at once, though with no great alacrity, till my zeal was quickened by a glimpse of circumstances, pointing to more serious issues than swaggering Alexander Tyrell's imaginary murderous or treasonable designs. True, he occasionally attended the meetings in John Street, but more from complaisance towards his sworn friend David Closs, managing clerk in a city attorney's office, and enthusiastic champion of the five points, than from any pleasure or interest he himself took in Chartist oratory, wildly as he cheered every denunciation of government villany and oppression. The sad truth was, that the deposition of the ministry and transference of the Treasury to the friendly gentlemen that dispensed their liberal eloquence from the John Street platform, would, taking the most sanguine calculation, be brought about too late for him; for so pressing were his needs, that delay was destruction—ruin! His experience in furnished lodgings had been, I found, during the last twelve months, large and various, and in so swiftly a descending scale that his present domicile was a back attic in Great Windmill Street, which, moreover, his landlady had given him peremptory notice to quit, lest peradventure her sheets and blankets should go the three-golden-balls way of her lodger's last shirt. Thus desperately circumstanced, Alexander Tyrell may be forgiven, sworn though he had eternal enmity to the vile British Government, for presenting himself at the Albany Barracks, and intimating his willingness to enlist in the Guards. Being very young-looking for his age, and standing nearly six feet in his stockings, he was provisionally accepted, received earnest of the king's bounty, and my surveillance of the gentleman's movements was, I imagined, at an end. I was mistaken: it was about

to seriously begin. A still young, and no question very handsome woman, before her fresh, country complexion—she was from Christchurch, Hampshire—and bright, girlish eyes had been grimed, quenched by constant daily and nightly toil in a wholesale millinery manufactory, and other beauty-marring agencies, presented herself at the barracks in a state of semi-distraction and informed the commanding officer that Tyrell was in his thirty-second year, and bound by a solemn engagement—sealed by a fatal pledge, to marry her directly he received the first instalment of the money due to him from the Government. She gave the name of Lydia Lockwood; and it being known that I took especial interest in the new recruit, I was commissioned to ascertain the truth or falsehood of her story. It was true enough, poor girl! She loved the fellow with the devoted apprehensiveness with which a solitary woman cast into the engulfing whirlpool of London labour life attaches herself to a man who from motives of real or simulated affection promises to lift her up from those gloomy depths to the peace and sunshine of a cheerful home. Her faith, too, in his honesty of purpose towards herself was but momentarily shaken by his attempt at enlistment, and she unhesitatingly sold her scanty furniture to a broker in order to raise the smart-money required, she was told, to insure Tyrell's discharge. This she offered him; but, much to my surprise, when a few days afterwards I chanced to hear of the circumstance—and I should suppose to hers also—he declined receiving it, the commanding officer having, he informed her, determined, in consequence of her representations, to cancel his provisional engagement without charge. Money, however, it was soon apparent he must have somewhere obtained, and to a large amount, inasmuch that he and his now inseparable crony David Closs, who had moreover suddenly lost his situation, forthwith entered upon a course of riotous living; that Tyrell himself dressed again as in his buckish days, and presented Lydia Lockwood with the means of making quite a fashionable appearance! A riddle to read this, especially as Closs was indebted to his employer when discharged—had been *therefore* discharged, and only saved from appearing at a police office by compassion for his wife and family. The attorney, Mr. B——, apprised of the dashing style of life assumed by his late clerk,



bethought him that he might not have discovered the whole extent of that person's defalcations, and a more rigorous investigation was gone into, without, however, producing any enlightening result, and the mystery, but for an accident, might have remained unsolved. The two friends, who had been indulging with their usual freedom at the Wrekin tavern, got into a brawl with some of their boon associates, when going home, which ended in a fight, and a night's lodging at a police station. There, as the custom is, they were searched, and a note was found in Tyrell's pocket, a copy of which I was in possession of early the next morning. It was from Closs, and had been received early the previous day : I transcribe it verbatim :—

“DEAR TYL,—If there is much more of Lydia Lockwood spooneyneess, we shall both of us have a capital chance of finding ourselves double-ironed in Newgate. That's a fact. That vulture Levy was waiting for me when I got home last night, and an infernal jobation he gave me. He swears we obtained his three hundred pounds by false pretences, and that if the bill is not paid on the day it falls due—and it wants but about three weeks till then—he will give us both into custody forthwith. A pleasant prospect, eh? What with the drink I was full of, and the old villain's brutal threats and abuse, my head so aches and throbs, that I can scarcely lift it from the pillow to scribble this note. I shall, however, be at the Wrekin to-night, when I hope to hear that you have made up your mind to go in and win. By —, it's enough to make one's hair stand on end to find that dread of a wench's tears and tongue stands between a sensible man and twenty thousand pounds! If that young feather-headed fool did not know me personally, I myself would run the risk of transportation to clutch such a prize, whilst you, lucky dog that you are in not being tied up—not at least by a legal halter—run no risk whatever. There must, mind you, be no more shilly-shallying: Newgate or twenty thousand pounds is about the size of it, and a fellow must have a queer sort of nut on his shoulders that in such a case hesitates for choice. We'll have a roaring jollification to-night, and to-morrow or next day you must be off, per mail, to Bristol.

“Yours faithfully,

D. C.”

Closs and Tyrell were discharged upon payment of a fine ; and neither appeared to suspect that the strictly " private and confidential " note had been looked into ; or perhaps Tyrell had not told his crafty friend that he had it about him. However that might have been, I was instructed to accompany Tyrell to Bristol, and take a hand at the game by which the confederates proposed to transfer £20,000 from some other person's possession to their own. The " vulture Levy's " case and grievance were easily fathomed. Closs, whom Levy knew as B——'s managing clerk, had introduced Tyrell to the usurer as a person who was entitled to, and would shortly receive, a large amount of money from the Treasury, but who, meantime, was in pressing want of £300, which representation had induced Levy to advance the required sum upon Tyrell's note for £400. With, however, that rogue-rob-rogue affair, I had not to concern myself ; neither, to confess the truth, did I set about that which was confided to me in a very dexterous fashion. Tyrell, whose handsome, well-stocked portmanteau bore a plate upon which was engraved " Alexander Champneys Tyrell, Esq., Hill Street, Berkeley Square," secured an inside place to Bristol by the night coach instead of the mail, and I, finding that the said passenger coach was then full inside and out, and that the faster mail would reach Bristol full an hour before the coach, determined, after first seeing Tyrell off, to travel by mail. I did so, and was in punctual though covert attendance when the night coach reached that city ; but, to my chagrin and dismay, *without* Alexander Champneys Tyrell, Esquire, who, for some reason unguessed of by me, had alighted at Swindon, where one of the passengers, from some remarks and inquiries he had made, thought he intended remaining for some time. Very strange that Tyrell, intending to go no farther than Swindon, should pay his fare, as he had done, to Bristol ; and was his halting there a trick or an afterthought ? Did he, perchance, know and recognize me, whilst watching him off from the White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, and in consequence, thus double as it were, to throw me off the scent ? I could hardly believe that could be the case, so careful had I been to keep well in shadow during the whole time I had been upon his track ; but whether so or not, it was essential to lose no time in

again striking the trail; and by eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the same day I was in Swindon, then a quiet country village, where I learned from the landlord of the Swan Inn, that a gentleman answering to the description I gave had breakfasted there, and directly afterwards hired a post-chaise, which had taken him about eight miles on the Warminster Road, to the Black Horse, a road-side public-house, where he had alighted, and discharged the chaise. In something less than three hours I reached the Black Horse, on foot, not wishing to attract either notice or inquiry, and found myself again too late and completely at fault. A gentleman from London had been there, hired a lad to show him where the Bennetts lived, been absent something over two hours, and, soon after returning to the Black Horse, had hailed a return Bath post-chaise that happened to pass, and set off therein for that city. I further ascertained that John Bennett was a farmer and widower in middling circumstances, who had two grown-up daughters living with him, one a comely young woman that folk said would shortly be the wife of William Rowcliffe, a native of that part of Wiltshire, but who for some time past had been living with his mother at Bristol. It was on my tongue to ask if there was any talk of a fortune having been left to the comely young woman or her sister; but I restrained myself, and, being too much knocked up to think of journeying further that day, I determined upon inventing some excuse for calling personally upon John Bennett before following Tyrell to Bath. I accordingly waited early the next morning upon Mr. Bennett—a sour, hard-grained, wiry fellow, and about as great a niggard of his words as he was by reputation of his money. “No; I have no old wheat to sell, nor barley either. The gentleman that called yesterday was *not* a buyer, and therefore cannot have forestalled you. Yes, that young woman is my daughter. As to handsome, why, handsome is as handsome does; and as that seems all you have to say, I have something else to do than stand gossiping here;” and so saying, the curmudgeon slammed the door—which he held in his hand whilst we were speaking—in my face.

A practised reader of the meanings of men does not, fortunately, depend altogether upon speech for their accurate

interpretation ; and the brief perusal I had obtained of the faces of Mr. Bennett and Clara Bennett was not without its value. Both father and daughter—I saw only the elder of the two sisters—were much and pleasurably, yet anxiously, excited. This the man's dilated, glittering glance, and his nervous clutch of the door-handle, resembling that of one suffering from the reaction of a previous night's debauch—the varying complexion of the young woman as she gazed at me with intense suspicious scrutiny—now bright and glowing, now shadowy and pale as stone but for the hectic spots that lent a fire they needed not to her piercing black eyes—plainly testified ; whilst that the previous day's visitor was in some way connected therewith required no further proof than Alexander Champneys Tyrell's fashionable card, held in her fidgeting, restless fingers. Neither could I doubt that Tyrell suspected or feared that a police-agent was at his heels—a fear suggested by the possibility which might have occurred to him that David Closs's confidential note had passed under “ detective ” scrutiny ; and that my visit, the visit of any questioning stranger, had been in consequence adroitly provided against ; though in what light his ingenuity had placed the probability or possibility of such a visit, or the purposes and character of the visitor, I of course could form no conjecture.

Further inquiry having elicited nothing in respect of the Bennetts towards enlightening me as to Tyrell's object in turning out of his way, as it seemed he had done, to have some half hour's conference with them, I hired a gig, and followed the quarry to Bath. There no tidings of the gentleman could be obtained, and I went on to Bristol, where, for a time, the same ill-fortune attended me. Tyrell could neither be seen or heard of ; no one that I questioned knew either a Mrs. Rowcliffe or her son, and I was mentally debating the expediency of inserting an advertisement in the local papers to the effect that a person of that name, formerly resident in the neighbourhood of Swindon, Wiltshire, might, by sending her address to Richard Samson, Esq., 16, Wine Street, hear of something to her advantage. This, however, was so every-day transparent a ruse that, supposing the Rowcliffes to be connected with the enterprise in which Tyrell was engaged—which, after all, was a wild surmise of mine, for which I could have given no intelligible

reason—could hardly fail of being seen through and defeated by a man whom the consciousness of a guilty purpose would render especially keen-sighted in the detection of such very common man-traps ; and I was still undecided, when fortune or accident remedied the mischance, that had so long, reckoning by my impatience, separated Tyrell and myself from each other. I met him one afternoon about three o'clock in Redcliffe Street, and so sudden and unexpected was the *recontre* that I could not help starting and changing colour as my eyes met his—a want of presence of mind which, however, convinced me of what I had been in some doubt of, namely, that I was personally unknown to the fashionably-attired gentleman whose stare and simper, as in condescending reply to my respectful question, he assured me I was mistaken in supposing him to be Captain Augustus Fancourt, of the — regiment then quartered in Bristol—were delightfully pleasant and refreshing. He was accompanied by a young, vulgar coxcomb, very sprucely attired, and displaying in his strutting gait and portentous manner, a consequence as new and ill-fitting as his fine, ready-made clothes. They were on their way to the coach-office, which they reached just in time to secure two outside places by the morrow's day-coach to London. Those were the only vacant seats ; but determined not to again lose sight of my slippery customer, I managed to make a private arrangement with the coachman, who, for a consideration, agreed to take me up at some distance on the road, and run the chance of an information against the proprietors of the “ Eclipse ” for carrying more than the stipulated ten outsiders, a venture which, fortunately for the tentative mission in which I was engaged, he, on that particular day, indulged in somewhat to excess. At the place where I was directed to await the coach I found a youngish, decently-dressed working-man, John Fentum by name, bound for London by the same conveyance ; and, under favour of a similar bargain to mine, though entered into by him from an economical motive. The “ Eclipse ” soon made its appearance, and its driver at length yielding to our importunity, agreed to give us a lift as far as Bath. Room was made for me in front, immediately behind the coachman, and by the side of Tyrell and his youthful friend—a remarkably wordy young

blade, I should say, at all times, but more abundantly so than usual it appeared on that occasion, and after the passing away of a flush of angry vexation, excited, or I deceived myself, by the unexpected and unwelcome sight of Fentum, who had quickly climbed up to the dickey, his natural eloquence being stimulated by an unusual flow of spirits, the exhilarating fineness of the day, and the flattering smiles of a pretty and prodigiously genteel young woman on the box-seat. After the fashion of malapert youth he was equally conversant with all topics; talked of the Carlist War of Succession, then raging in the Peninsula, with Tyrell—an indirect recognition of that gentleman's military moustaches; to me, but loftily, with patronising condescension, of the new reformed House of Commons, which he pronounced to be a despicable failure; and to the damsel on the box-seat of James' or Bulwer's last novel; the whole profusely interspersed with hints, quite as interesting to me as they could be to the said damsel, charmingly conscious as she did her best to look, that the young gentleman, whom a whim and the genial weather had, for once, induced to travel on the outside of a stage-coach, had lately come into possession of a large fortune. Not unamusing all that, and might be instructive, the more probably that Tyrell anxiously strove to confine his *protégé's* eloquence to national themes; at last with success, and the inflated young man, seizing the favourable opportunity afforded by the coach passing over a track of greensward, burst out with a flaming apostrophe to "Glory and Greece! The Sword, the Banner, and the Field!" *à propos* of what I do not remember; but if not quite intelligible it was very sonorous, and the admiring silence which followed its delivery remained unbroken, till a voice from the dickey called out, "Billy, I say, Billy!" each "Billy" emphasized by a poke in the small of the confounded elocutionist's back with the point of John Fentum's umbrella; which person, stretching himself over the roof of the coach, claimed acquaintance in that very disgusting fashion with the suddenly extinguished orator, whose face, flaming with shame and rage, was, however, kept determinedly in the direction of the spires of Bath in spite of his remorseless tormentor's persistent iteration of "Billy," presently amplified into, "I say, Billy, your mother served me a pretty trick this morning—

fobbed me off with two stale buns at the price of new ones ; a shameful imposition, I call it ! ” uttered in so ludicrous a tone that every soul on the coach—the victim, of course, excepted—burst at once into explosions of laughter, which were only repressed by the tact of the coachman, who, anything but desirous, under the circumstances, of irritating a legitimate passenger, or permitting others to do so, caused his leaders to suddenly prance and curvet after a fashion that instantly checked the general mirth ; and when the alarm had subsided it was time for me and Fentum, in accordance with our understanding with the coachman—Bath being less than half a mile distant—to descend from the roof of the “ Eclipse,” and not attempt to resume our places till at about the same distance on the other side of that city.

“ Who is that chattering puppy whose comb you cut so cleverly ? ” I asked Fentum, as we trudged on after the coach.

“ Who is he ? Why, William Rowcliffe, whose mother keeps a bread-and-bun-shop in Broadmead, and a friendly chap, too, till the fortune they say he’s come to sent his brains a-ballooning. He cocked up his nose, and pretended not to know Jack Fentum, when I met him yesterday with his grand friend ; but I have paid him quite twenty shillings in the pound upon that score. As to his mother, she’s a very decent, good sort of woman ; and it’s all chaff, mind you, about the stale buns.”

“ I supposed so. By-the-way, is that swell in moustaches the grand friend you speak of ? ”

“ Yes ; he’s a Government man, and brought down the news of William Rowcliffe’s fortune.”

“ A Government man, is he ? What kind of a Government man ? ”

“ Ah, there you nonplush me. I only know that Mrs. Rowcliffe told me herself that she had seen letters with ‘ On His Majesty’s Service ’ printed on the outside, directed to him, and signed by Prime Ministers. He’s a first-rate nob, depend upon it, and I wish now that I had not curry-combed young Rowcliffe’s tender hide quite so roughly.”

“ It might have been as well, perhaps, not to have done so. Are you sure of work when you reach London ? ”

“ Very far from sure, worse luck.”

"Where shall you hang out till you do? Perhaps I could recommend you to cheaper lodgings."

"It ain't likely, mister, that you could, seeing that I shall take up with my married sister, at No. 9, Rupert Street, Haymarket. That is the West End, is it not?"

"Well, perhaps so, considering it is neither the east, south, or north end. Is Mrs. Rowcliffe, the widow, a marrying woman, think you?"

"A marrying woman! Oh, I say, mister, you are a-squinting round that corner, are you? But it's no go, my friend; Mrs. Rowcliffe's a widow bewitched, though she don't advertise herself in that capacity, and folk generally don't care to talk about it."

"A widow bewitched!"

"Yes; meaning thereby that her husband is gone abroad upon Government account, for having once upon a time forgot to sign his right name. But so much talk, do you know, Mr. Londoner, makes my throat feel uncommon dry."

"No doubt it must do so; and here, luckily, is the Ring of Bells, where we can moisten it."

I left Fentum in the enjoyment of that agreeable pastime, and walked quickly to the inn where the "Eclipse" changed horses, and the passengers were permitted to snatch a hasty breakfast, which, on that morning, was partaken of by John Bennett and his daughter Clara, both in gala dress, and the young woman—girl, rather—who seemed to be in fragile health, all smiles and blushes. They were of course there by appointment, and I noticed that Alexander Champneys Tyrell was superabundantly gracious towards both father and daughter; whilst the ostensible lover, Rowcliffe, looked glum and uneasy, as wishing to be gone rather than prolong or dally with the flying moments. The criterion by which I judged was, however, a very imperfect one, being merely the reflection of their faces and gestures in the large chimney-glass of the breakfast-room, obliquely visible from the slightly opened folding-door through which, being, of course, anxious that neither Bennett nor his daughter should glimpse their late visitor, I furtively peeped at the party whose conversation, amidst the clatter of knives and forks, was unintelligible, though not so entirely so but that I gladly comprehended



Bennett and his daughter had no intention of accompanying their friends to town. I remained but a few minutes in observation; and, hastening off, was overtaken in due time by the coach, and at about seven o'clock the same evening I saw Alexander Champneys Tyrell, Esq., and William Rowcliffe, Esq., safely housed at the Hummums Hotel, Covent Garden, where, less than two hours afterwards, they were joined by David Closs and Lydia Lockwood, both dashingy dressed, and, it seemed, in gleeful good humour. The plot was thickening, and rapidly too.

True, but what *was* the plot: what catastrophe did it foreshadow, and which were the villains, which the victims of the play? Puzzling queries these, and not even partially answered by the occurrences of the next fortnight: continuous parties of pleasure; visits to the theatres, at which William Rowcliffe was always Lydia Lockwood's beau; and researches on our part at Doctors' Commons, from which it resulted that no legacy, large or small, had fallen to any one of the name of Rowcliffe or Bennett. It almost seemed that we were labouring under some inexplicable delusion, chasing shadows, not tangible realities; and I was in the very act of writing to the commissioner, begging him to appoint some other officer to pursue the wearying, bootless investigation, when a lady, desirous of speaking with me, was announced.

"No lady, Mr. Waters," exclaimed the person that followed behind the servant girl; "no lady, but a wretched, wronged, outraged woman. Do you not recognise me?" she added, tossing passionately aside, and tearing by her violence the costly veil which covered her face. "I know you very well!"

"Lydia Lockwood!"

"Yes, Lydia Lockwood, one of the conspirators whom you, stanch bloodhound of the law, have been, I more than suspect, for some time closely tracking. Well, sir, I am here to inform you that there are two conspiracies afloat, in one of which I am a cheater—in the other the cheated!"

"If this, Miss Lockwood, be a confession, let me warn you that all you say may be—"

"Used against me hereafter," broke in the infuriate woman, whose eyes glared with a fiery rage that cast a light as of

insanity over her white, haggard countenance, though her speech was constrainedly calm and measured—unnaturally so. “Be it so; there is no terror for such a wretch as I in any ‘hereafter’ over which magistrates have power. Yet will I not be tamely, unresistingly sacrificed: other and guiltier lips than mine shall taste the bitter potion of which it was hoped, is hoped, I alone shall be compelled to drink. But enough of vain words. You have really discovered nothing as yet, with all your practised cunning.”

“Nothing of very great importance.”

“Nothing of the slightest importance; nor without me could you do so till it were too late to profit by that knowledge. The avenging lightning will be hurled by my hand—my hand alone. Now hearken, sir, and heedfully. Tyrell imparted to me that it had come to his friend Closs’s knowledge, in the course of business, that one Rowcliffe was entitled to a large sum of money that had lain unclaimed for a long time in the Funds or Consols, and which he could only obtain by Closs’s aid. That being so, it was but fair, they argued, that Tyrell and Closs should have a share in the prize, and, that they might be certain of doing so, it was arranged that Tyrell should go to Bristol, acquaint Rowcliffe in general terms with his claim, bring him to London, profess great friendship for him, and, with my help, entangle, fascinate him. Oh, I could tear my heart out to know that, in giving credence to such trash, I showed myself to be the vain fool they took me for: I was even to half-promise myself in marriage to the susceptible, inexperienced simpleton—and, with them, work upon him till he consented to share the riches that had, as it were, dropped to him from the clouds. That accomplished, the promise which has lured me to ruin, destruction, crime, was to be immediately fulfilled, and—but” suddenly broke off the unhappy young woman, and speaking with accelerated rapidity, “but I need not waste sentiment upon Mr. Waters. Well, all this was a tissue—warp and woof—of unmitigated lies. William Rowcliffe was entitled to no money; but a girl was, one Clara Bennett, who, it was known, loved Rowcliffe—puppy and simpleton that he is—but that is nothing new; and the plan of the confederates was—more correctly Closs’s plan, for he alone had the brains to conceive it—was this: Tyrell was to see the Bennetts at Swin-

don—ah! you know all about that, I dare say—under pretence of procuring William Rowcliffe's address, which was already so well known to them that Closs knew both him and his mother personally; he had been, I think, engaged in defending the elder Rowcliffe, who was convicted of some crime. Well, Tyrell, having obtained the address, and incidentally mentioned Rowcliffe's pretended accession of wealth, was to affect, whilst passing himself off as a very great man, sudden, but involuntary admiration of the girl; with a view, of course, to an ulterior, well meditated purpose. Everything fell out as desired and anticipated. Rowcliffe's empty head was turned with his imaginary high fortune; Clara Bennett was no longer good enough for him; and the insolent booby told her so to her face, as he himself boasted to me last Thursday afternoon, a few hours after her arrival, I am sure at Tyrell's suggestion, in London, accompanied by her father. A terrible scene ensued: the young woman fainted, and, upon recovering, found that, though the recreant swain was gone, Alexander Champneys Tyrell remained, who had no longer any hesitation in declaring his devotion for her; and the upshot was, that the scorned and slighted girl, urged by her father, dreading to encounter the sneers that would await her should she return home unmarried, fell into the trap set for her; and on the day after to-morrow Clara Bennett will be Mrs. Tyrell! Only think, will have the honour of being Alexander Champneys Tyrell's lady wife! ho, ho! Well, one can but laugh to think how strange a world this is we live in; and what fearful slips sometimes occur 'twixt cups and lips. 'Pon my word, that is rhyme, if you take it in time—is it not, clever Mr. Waters?"

The longer I listened to Lydia Lockwood the stronger grew my conviction that she was positively insane; or that—but no, that was not the excitement of drink; not originally or chiefly, at all events.

"Your disclosures, Miss Lockwood," I hesitatingly began, "would—"

"To the devil with your *Miss* Lockwood?" she fiercely interrupted. "To the devil, did I say? ah! true words are often spoken in jest; false ones by solemn oaths! You were going to say, no doubt," she added, with renewed vivacity, "that I

could foil those wretches without your help. True; but it glanced across me that my purpose might not hold; and that it were well to place the matter beyond my own power. I shall not tell you, either, how I discovered all this. Enough that I have discovered it, and by—Well, good-bye; at ten in the morning after to-morrow, remember, if I should forget it—which, however, is not very likely—that the parson will ask if there is any just cause or impediment why Alexander Tyrell and Clara Bennett should not be joined in holy wedlock. Just cause! O thou all-seeing Christ!”

She was gone!

A few sentences will finish this narrative. Clara Bennett and her father, apprised by me of the true state of affairs, left London for Swindon the next evening; and in the following day's evening papers there appeared this paragraph:—“**DETERMINED SUICIDE.**—Early this morning a young woman was seen to throw herself off Westminster Bridge into the river: she was drowned. Her name is Lydia Lockwood.”



## CHAPTER XIV

MARK STRETTON.

A FIRE suddenly burst forth late one winter evening in the stables attached to a large house on Wimbledon Common, then in the occupation of David Stretton, Esquire, a retired merchant of large wealth. I happened to be not far off, and, as in duty bound, hastened to afford what assistance I could. By great exertions and good fortune, the fire was confined to the stables, which were totally consumed; and being, like most Yorkshiremen, pretty skilful in the management of horses, I succeeded in saving two very valuable fillies, which, frenzied by the flames, and plunging wildly, could not be brought out till, with considerable difficulty and danger, I had managed to blind them to the red glare of the conflagration.

There could be no doubt that the fire was accidental—a groom had let fall an open lighted lantern upon a heap of loose straw; and being satisfied upon that point, I was about leaving, when I was told that Mr. Stretton wished to speak with me.

Obedying the summons, as a matter of course, I, in two or three minutes, found myself in the presence of David Stretton, Esquire, an aged invalid, very nearly used-up by the fret and fever of fifty years of successful trade. Mr. Stretton was by no means of a niggardly disposition, as the present he made me gave twenty golden proofs. The fillies I had mainly helped to save were not only of great value, but his especial pets; and he would not, he said, for any sum, that they should have been injured, much less burned to death. Besides the master of the house, there were in the drawing-room two gentlemen whom I had noticed at the fire, and a Miss Clara Vignolles, Mr. Stretton's niece.

This lady was plain in features, which were somewhat coarsely

marked with small-pox, and could not, I guessed, be much less than thirty ; but there was an expression of sweetness, of mild good nature about her clear brown eyes and placid mouth, which was pleasing at first sight, and would, I was quite sure, improve upon acquaintance.

Miss Vignolles was, I observed, an object of sedulous attention to the elder of the two youngish gentlemen, whom I heard addressed as Monsieur Morny. I supposed him, from his name, to be a Frenchman, and from his fierce moustache, a *militaire*—moustaches in those days not being such common civilian appendages as now. Indeed, a gentleman with the heroic baptismal name of Achilles, which I afterwards knew to be his, could not properly have been anything else. A tall, well-set-up personage was M. Achilles Morny. His face was a hard, handsome one ; his complexion a swarthy saffron ; and his dark eyes were full of light—not light from heaven, was clear to my practised ken at a glance.

Mark Stretton, the younger man, and Mr. David Stretton's nephew, was unmistakably a product of home growth. His complexion was as fair as that of his cousin, Miss Vignolles ; his eyes and hair bright brown, like hers ; the *ensemble* of his countenance presenting a much more striking contrast to that of M. Achilles Morny than even the difference of contour and colour, in its aspect of intense nervousness, dejection, timidity, which in an Englishman of sufficiently vigorous physical health, could not but strike the beholder with surprise. He looked me sharply in the face, upon hearing my name mentioned by his uncle, and as quickly withdrew his gaze ; a slight colour flushing his fair, pale face as he did so. Had I been professionally engaged in any affair with which Mr. Mark Stretton was ever so slightly connected, I should have felt a curious interest in those symptoms of a mind disturbed : as it was they excited but a momentary curiosity, and vanished from my memory, till revived by subsequent events. M. Achilles did not honour me with the slightest notice, which, as matters turned out, was fortunate.

Five or six months had slipped away, and I was passing along Half-Moon Street, Piccadilly, when my attention was challenged by a violent uproar in the first-floor of No. 11 in that street.

Up flew one of the windows, giving egress to volleys of glass and crockery, flung out upon the pavement by a woman, who, whilst doing so, screamed "Murder! murder!" with might and main.

I hurried to the street door, and knocked peremptorily till it was opened by the landlady, a Mrs. Parkins, whom I knew to be the widow of a naval officer, eking out a scanty pension by letting furnished lodgings. She explained that the furious hubbub going on upstairs was merely a violent quarrel between a foreign gentleman and his wife who occupied her first-floor. The lady, who was of a very jealous temperament, suspected her husband of an intrigue with a Miss Vignolles——

"Vignolles! Vignolles!" I interrupted; "the name seems familiar to me."

"The husband, Monsieur Morny——"

"Morny! Vignolles!—I remember now. Excuse me. Pray proceed."

"From what I can make out," resumed Mrs. Parkins, "the husband, in changing his dress for dinner, left a note in the waistcoat he put off, which Madame Morny, chancing to pounce upon, found to be from a Miss Vignolles, and at once gave way to a torrent of invective rage, accompanying the same by smashing every breakable thing of value upon the floor, or by hurling it out of the window."

This explanation was given during a partial lull in the marital storm, which again broke forth with augmented fury and renewed cries of "Murder! *On m'étrangle!* Murder! Help!" &c., &c.

Remarking that I was bound to ascertain personally the cause of those frantic outcries, I ascended the stairs two or three at a time; the landlady, meanwhile, securing the door with bolt and chain against the intrusion of the mob, rapidly collecting outside.

I passed into the back first-floor room, which communicated by folding-doors with the front apartment. The violence of the altercation going on prevented my entrance from being noticed, and I paused to ask myself whether I had a legal right to interfere. I saw that not only a furious conflict in words was going on, but a bodily struggle for the possession of a note,

which, as I came upon the scene, the gentleman was on the point of wresting from the lady's clutch. This was not the kind or degree of violence to justify cries of "murder"; and I was about to make a movement in retreat when the man turned round by the swing of his successful effort to secure the paper, and brought within my view the reflection of his face in a chimney-mirror, which at the same moment revealed my presence to him. I at once recognised the M. Morny I had seen at Wimbledon Common.

Fiercely confronting me, he asked who I was, and what I did there ?

"I am a police-officer; and I am here because I heard cries of 'murder,' which issued from this room."

The lady, a fine creature, in a frenzy of rage, rushed by him towards me.

"A police, are you?" she exclaimed. "My God! that is what I wish. This man is a wretch—a monster! He is trying to seduce——"

"Silence!" thundered M. Achilles Morny, catching her by the arm, and swinging her away with such force that she fell over an ottoman on the floor. "Silence, fool!" he added, with deadly malignity of tone, as he seized and raised her; "or, by all the devils, thou shalt repent of it!"

Fear quelled the woman's rage, and she burst into tears.

"And now, sir, will you begone," said M. Achilles Morny, turning fiercely upon me, "or must I kick you from my apartment?"

"If the lady is willing to declare upon oath that she is in fear of personal violence at your hands, I will take you to the nearest police-station at once."

"You take me to the police-station, you cursed English dog!"

"Do you, madam, apprehend further personal violence from this man?" I asked.

"No—no—no," sobbed the woman; "I was violent—wrong. It is a man-and-wife quarrel. Go away—go!"

"And quick! in one moment!" shouted the husband; "or, thunder of hell, I shall help you down-stairs! Like this, do you see? Ah, the devil!"



He had seized my arm to help me down-stairs, and was unpleasantly surprised to find himself tripped up and sprawling on his back. I laughed, and walked away. In the passage below I found Mrs. Parkins awaiting me. She said Monsieur and Madame Morny had resided in her house about six weeks only, and that such scenes as I had witnessed, though not always so violent, were of frequent occurrence. What was she to do? I could only advise her to get rid of such undesirable lodgers as quickly as she could, and then left the house, outside of which a small crowd of curious idlers were still assembled.

Extraordinary! *very* extraordinary! thought I, that such a person as this Morny appears to be should have obtained a footing of intimacy in Mr. David Stretton's family! The wife's suspicion, that he is engaged in an intrigue with Miss Vignolles, must be the coinage of her own jealous brain. The supposition was simply absurd. Far likelier that the lady calling herself Madame Morny was her pretended husband's mistress, and that the handsome Frenchman was wooing Miss Vignolles for his wife. A pity if that were so; but certainly no business of mine.

M. Achilles Morny could not forgive the outrage I had inflicted upon his personal dignity; and, chancing to see me about a week afterwards, as he—much the worse for wine—was leaving Crockford's Club-house, St. James's Street, he seized the opportunity of taking a little pleasant revenge. He had recognized me by the glare of the gas-lamps before I noticed him, and, suddenly shaking off his companion's arm, he sprang down the club-house steps, and, with arms a-kimbo, hurtled full at me, with the intention of tumbling me upon the sloppy pavement (it had been raining all day), or, better still, into the roadway slush, by accident, as it were. He nearly succeeded, too—would have done so, entirely to his own satisfaction, I have little doubt, but that he was half-drunk. As it happened, I just managed to step back clear of his rush, and, unable to check himself, he went headlong across the pavement, slipped, stumbled, fell into a heap of slush-mud, and, quite unable to regain his feet, wallowed helplessly therein, till picked up by his friend and one of Crockford's porters.

The mud-and-slush-soused spectacle which he presented

was so irresistibly ludicrous, that the volleys of abuse he sputtered at me were quite powerless to check the malicious merriment it excited; and it seemed that the man must have gone mad with rage, had not Mr. Mark Stretton, whom I had not at first recognized, compelled him, with the porter's help, to re-enter the club-house.

I had not gone far when I was overtaken by Mr. Stretton, junior.

"May I ask Mr. Waters," said the young man, abruptly, "where he became acquainted with Monsieur Morny? and how he has contrived to make an enemy of that gentleman?"

"My acquaintance with M. Morny is of the slightest," I answered; "it happened that I witnessed a disreputable scene between him and his wife. That's all."

"He has no wife," was the rejoinder. "Would to God he had! You must mean Adèle St. Ange, a fine brunette, some thirty years of age."

"Yes; a fine brunette, as you say, but not, I think, as old as that."

"Mademoiselle St. Ange bears her age well." Having said that, Mr. Mark Stretton was silent for a minute or two, looking me in the face the while with anxious inquisition. "You have a reputation, Waters," he resumed, abruptly, "for singular acuteness and daring in your profession."

"I am sometimes fortunate. Quite as often the reverse."

"I have vital need of the services of a sagacious, resolute man. Yet I see not," he added, checking himself—"yet I see not how any degree of skill or resolution could help me! At all events, it's ill talking in this wretched weather. Some other time, perhaps. Good night."

Another faint gleam of light was thus thrown over what I could well believe was a very gloomy business. Achilles Morny must, in some way, have got young Stretton in his toils—most likely by pillaging him at the gaming-table—and was now making use of that evil influence to obtain the hand of amply-dowered Clara Vignolles. Else what meant, "He has no wife—would to God he had"? It might be, too, that Mark Stretton himself loved his lady-cousin! No—that was not likely. She was four or five years his senior, and young men seldom get

crazed by charms of which thirty winters, to say nothing of small-pox, have marred the bloom and beauty. The affair would no doubt run its course, without, or in despite of, my assistance, should it be asked for, to its natural termination—a mercenary marriage, desertion by the foreign husband, followed by years of unavailing regret and bitter self-reproach on the part of the wife. A trite story, old as rascaldom, common as woman's faith and folly!

I erred in supposing that my aid would not be required in a matter which seemed quite out of my line. It was near upon the close of that year's autumn when my attention was caught by the following paragraph in a morning paper, copied from *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* :—

“DEPLORABLE ACCIDENT.—We deeply regret to announce that Mr. David Stretton, of Bellevue House, Wimbledon Common, near London, who had been, for some time past, residing at Clifton for the benefit of his health, fell, on Tuesday evening, at near dusk, from the lofty cliffs which beetle over the Avon. He was watching the play of the fading light upon the Leigh woods opposite, from the very edge of the precipice. Some portion of the ground gave way suddenly beneath his feet, and, unable to spring back, the unfortunate gentleman toppled over with a loud cry, and fell headlong down the face of the cliff. This, it will be seen, is the account given of the fatal accident by Monsieur Morny, a French gentleman, the only person within sight or hearing of the deceased when the catastrophe occurred. The lamented gentleman's large property is said to be bequeathed to his nephew, Mr. Mark Stretton, and his niece, Miss Clara Vignolles, in equal portions. The verdict was, of course, ‘Accidental death.’”

I need not dwell upon the vague doubts, suspicions, which, knowing what I did of M. Morny, arose in my mind as I ran over the above paragraph; and I turned eagerly to the report of the proceedings at the inquest, which, considerably condensed, was given in another column. Only one witness besides M. Achilles Morny had, I found, been examined—a Mr. Leonard Bayton—who deposed that when it was quite dark he heard, not one cry only, but several, of horror and despair, it seemed to him, from about the spot where the accident must have occurred. He hurried in the direction of those cries, but could see no one, and after searching about for some time he resumed his way homeward. This evidence had passed without remark; in fact,

the only pertinent question put to the witness Morny was this, by one of the jurymen: "How, if it was dark at the time of the accident, could the deceased have been watching the play of light upon the Leigh woods?" Before M. Morny, "who was much agitated, Mr. Stretton having been his intimate and attached friend," could answer, the coroner, referring to his notes, said the witness Morny had stated it was dusk, not dark, when the catastrophe occurred. This explanation must have been held to be satisfactory, as a verdict of "accidental death" was at once and unanimously agreed to. Strange! Passing strange!

Late in the following week a hurriedly-scribbled note, directed to me, was delivered at Scotland Yard. It was signed "Mark Stretton," and expressed an urgent request that I would write at once to Bellevue House, Wimbledon Common, stating where he, Mark Stretton, could see me privately on the morrow.

I lost no time in posting a reply, appointing the Fox Tavern, Kingsland Road, as the place, and two p.m. as the hour, of meeting. Arrived there, he was to ask for Charles Smith, and would be shown into a private room.

I had been at the rendezvous about ten minutes when a hack-carriage drove up, and Mr. Mark Stretton presently entered the room.

I started with uncontrollable surprise. Mark Stretton was the spectre of his former self. The paper upon which I am writing was not whiter than his face, his eyes glared with unnatural fire, and his whole frame shook as with ague. I had ordered brandy and water, and, as he dropped into a chair, I pushed the untasted glass towards him. He emptied it without a word, and at a gulp. The strong spirit partially re-strung his nerves, and he said, huskily—

"Waters, I am in a fearful strait! Will you stand by me?"

"Be calm, Mr. Stretton," I replied; "and when I am informed of the nature of the fearful strait you speak of, I will frankly state whether I can stand by you to any useful and just purpose."

"You refuse to commit yourself! I feared so, and—I care not! you shall know all! It can, at worst, but hasten the inevitable catastrophe. Have you seen in the papers," he added,

with quivering eyes and tongue—"have you seen in the papers an account of the death of—of—"

He broke off abruptly, bursting into a passion of tears.

"You were about asking me, Mr. Stretton, if I had read in the newspapers an account of your venerable uncle's death? I *have* done so, and have formed a strong opinion upon the case."

"And that opinion is—*must* be—that the verdict lied; that my uncle was foully murdered!"

"That is going too far. Permit me, however, to ask if M. Achilles Morny is a suitor for the hand of Miss Vignolles, and if that suit was opposed to the wishes and will of your deceased uncle?"

"Yes—yes—yes!" cried Mark Stretton, springing to his feet, and striking the table with his clenched fist at each iteration. "Clara, infatuated simpleton! engaged herself to Morny several months since. That engagement became known to my uncle just four days before the 'accident' at Clifton; and he emphatically declared in Morny's presence that he should at once so alter his will that Clara, if she fulfilled her pledge, should not have a farthing."

"How, then, happened it that Morny was walking amicably with your uncle upon the evening in question?"

"That was a lie of Morny's! They were not, could not, be walking together. I have no more doubt than of my own life, that Morny, seizing a favourable moment, stole behind, or treacherously accosted my uncle, and after a struggle, brief but desperate, of which the cries were heard by Bayton, hurled his victim over the cliff, unseen by any eye save God's."

"Unseen by any eye save God's. There can be no proof, then, to justify the terrible conclusion at which you have arrived! And let me ask, Mr. Stretton, how it happened that you did not present yourself before the inquest, and contradict Morny's sworn assertion, that your uncle was an attached and constant friend, with whom he was amicably conversing a few moments only before the deceased fell over the cliff?"

"I *dared* not," replied Mark Stretton, with a shudder, and relapsing into nervous weakness; "I should not now," he added, "dare confide the truth to you, but that I am resolved, come what, come may—shame—infamy—an ignominious death

to myself—that Clara Vignolles shall never wed the murderer of her good, kind uncle.”

“I do not understand! You are threatened with shame, infamy, an ignominious death, if you but hint a suspicion that your uncle met with foul play! Who is it that can menace you with such tremendous penalties? Morny?”

“No other. Waters, my life—my innocent life—innocent in purpose, if not in deed—is in his power! A word of his would consign me to the gallows! You start back amazed—repulsed—indignant! But, at all events, you will listen in a candid spirit to what I have to say before condemning, abandoning me?”

“Certainly I will; and, if you please, let the solution you have volunteered of this confounding business be as explicit as possible.”

“I will be thoroughly explicit. You are aware that my late uncle was never married, and that I and Miss Vignolles have been for many years the acknowledged heirs of his wealth. One wish dear to his heart was, that I should marry my cousin Clara, in order that the property might not be divided. Neither of us was desirous of carrying out our uncle’s wish, or whim, in that particular; and as to myself, I, with the perversity common to spoilt youth, must needs fall in love with a young lady who had nothing but a pure mind and a charming person to offer in exchange for money-riches.”

“To which exchange your uncle peremptorily objected, and the course of true love ran awry as usual. I understand.”

“You are to some extent mistaken. My uncle did not insist upon carrying out his own will in that particular; but having a high respect for the lady—whose name had best remain unspoken—he stipulated that the constancy of my attachment should be tested by time and absence—say a twelvemonth—to be passed by me in the United States of America—New York principally—in which city important matters of business remained unsettled, which my presence there might help to wind up. I sailed with a light heart,” continued Mr. Stretton, “from Liverpool, in the New York liner, ‘Napoleon,’ and after a pleasant voyage reached my destination in health and safety. The commercial affairs I had to settle occupied me some five or

six months, during which period I had an abundance of idle time on my hands, whilst awaiting instructions from England as to how I should deal with certain cases and propositions. That fatal leisure led me to the hells of the Empire City, where I met and soon became intimate with M. Achilles Morny, a Belgian born, of French extraction, who had come to North America in search of reputedly wealthy relatives, whose progenitors had emigrated to Lower or French Canada, in the time of Louis XV. If he succeeded in clearly tracing his ancestry amongst the simple 'habitans'—of that I know nothing—he altogether failed in levying money-contributions upon them, which, of course, was his sole object in seeking them out. Disgusted by his ill-success, M. Morny came to New York, with the hope of better luck at the gaming-tables of that wealthy city. He was again disappointed, being, in fact, but a sorry gamester, and utterly unfitted to cope, if only from the excitability of his temperament, with the cool, clever Yankees. I myself won considerable sums of him; and at last he was fairly done-up, reduced to his last dollar, and he asked me for the loan of means to enable him and Adèle Saint Ange—whom I then supposed to be his wife—to return to Brussels. The request was readily granted, and he was set up upon his 'blacklegs' again; he being, as I had often heard hinted, and now fully believe, an arrant cheat, though generally an unsuccessful one."

"There are more cheats of that class than outsiders would readily believe," I remarked, whilst Mr. Stretton moistened his fevered lips.

"Morny," continued Mr. Stretton—"Morny had gained sufficient experience to refuse risking the loan he had obtained of me in the New York hells. The simpler folk of Montreal and Quebec would, he hoped, be less difficult to fleece. He proposed, therefore, to return to Europe *viâ* Canada, and suggested that I might accompany him upon so exciting a pleasure trip as far as Quebec, as I should have nothing to do till letters reached me from England, which could hardly be under two months. I at once agreed to do so. A feeling of reticence," Mr. Stretton went on to say, "disinclined me to travel in my own name with Monsieur and Madame Morny;

but the excuse I made to them was, that my uncle might be angry if he should hear that I had been amusing myself in Canada when I ought to have been patiently awaiting instructions in New York. The name I assumed was that of Matthew Skinner—the initials being the same as those marked on my linen. The Mornys suggested no objection, and we set off together in high spirits. Our first halting-place was Montreal. I did not join with Morny in his forage upon the small deer of that city; not, certainly, deterred therefrom by any scruple of conscience, but because the *ennui* which had driven me to gaming in New York was banished by the novel and picturesque aspect of the city and its motley population, and I required no coarser stimulant. I tire you, perhaps, with these details?"

"Not at all, sir. Pray tell your story in your own way."

"Arrived at Quebec, on the Saint Lawrence, at which place the Mornys were to embark for Antwerp, and where we remained three weeks, the old feeling of lassitude came back upon me with as much force as ever, and after 'doing the heights of Abraham, the scene of Wolfe's victory,' half-a-dozen times over, I was fain to seek such excitement as the Quebec hells might afford. Accursed infatuation! miserable imbecility!" he added, with a burst of passion, "to which I owe it that I have since been the vassal of a man I hate and loathe—the bond-slave of my uncle's murderer!"

I remained silent, and Mr. Stretton, soon sufficiently mastering his emotion, resumed—

"The play-den which Morny and I chiefly frequented was an apartment on the first-floor of Le Coq, a tavern in the lower town, so close upon the edge of a quay, that a quaint balcony, built out, as it were, from the room in which play was carried on, projected over the Saint Lawrence. This balcony was a favourite smoking-place in fine weather for the gamblers during intervals of active play, or when fevered by the vicissitudes of the game. The frequenters of Le Coq were chiefly second or third rate merchants, shipowners, sea-captains, and the stakes, as a rule, moderate. Amongst other Quebec notabilities, of a minor degree, was one Aimé Bontemps, the son of a shipowner. He was a slight young man, of excitable temperament, sudden



and quick in quarrel, whom losses, if at all considerable, lashed into ungovernable fury. Few, in consequence, liked to play with him, and the less so as he was known to be as ready with pistol as with tongue. One Sunday evening—I had by that time cast off all English habits of reverence for Sabbath and home sanctities—one Sunday evening I dropped in at *Le Coq*, where I found Bontemps, Morny, and a stranger, whose name I afterwards knew to be Leroux. Morny and Leroux seemed to be in very dismal mood; they had, I found, been playing at hazard with Bontemps, and had lost considerably. That which quenched them had, of course, lent him fire, and he bouncingly challenged Monsieur l'Américain—I had given myself out to be a citizen of the Union—to recover his friend Morny's losses. I, too, was in rollicking spirits, having in the course of the afternoon imbibed a considerable quantity of wine, and unhesitatingly accepted the challenge. The game was to be simple hazard; that is to say, as you well know, an even bet upon the colour, red or black, of a card turned up alternately by each player. It was my first turn to call, and placing a twenty-dollar note upon the card, I cried, 'Rouge!'

"One might soon lose a fortune, Mr. Stretton, at such play as that."

"True, and Bontemps, though a rash gamester when the fit was on, hesitated to accept it. He did so, however, reassured, probably, by my flustered, not to say intoxicated, condition, which even at so blind a game gave promise of victory to the more sober player. 'Rouge!' I won! The play flew on with fiery speed, its rapid alternations of gain and loss, together with the stimulants we swallowed, exciting us almost to delirium. Night fell, and declining candles, the table was removed to the balcony, and we played on by the quite sufficient light of the brilliant Canadian moon and stars. Morny and Leroux watched us with eager interest, especially when, after about two hours' play, Fortune declared decisively on my side. I had not only won back all that Leroux and Morny had lost, the whole of the money Bontemps had brought with him to *Le Coq*, but he was indebted to me over £100. Still fast and furious the cries of 'Noir!—rouge!—rouge!—noir!' succeeded each other, Bontemps' curses mingling with my triumphant laughter, till he was in my

debt quite £300. 'Malediction!' he exclaimed, starting up and glaring at me with blood-shot, fiery eyes, 'you must be in league with the devil!' I laughed derisively, and shuffled the cards afresh. This was too much for the hot-blooded young man. 'Cheat! rascal! villain!' he shouted, and struck me with his open hand upon the cheek, 'you have robbed me!' It required but such an outrage to completely madden me. I sprang upon him with a scream of rage—struck, seized, pinioned him, and, with an exertion of maniacal strength, hurled him over the balcony into the deep, swift river beneath. I saw the body cut the water, and disappear beneath the glittering surface; then the sudden revulsion—the flashing consciousness that I was a homicide—quelled in a moment both strength and rage; my brain reeled, and I fell upon the floor in a swoon. The next seven or eight hours are a blank to me, except so far as memory recalls the chaotic images of a fevered, drunken dream, from which I awoke to find myself whirling along in a close carriage in company with Madame Morny. The first words she uttered instantly recalled the shame and horror of the preceding night, and I listened with a beating heart to what she had further to communicate. I had killed Bontemps; there was no doubt about that: his body had been picked up by some boatmen after it had been about two hours in the water. Meanwhile Morny, aided by Leroux and Jean Pipon, landlord of Le Coq, had borne me away to a place of concealment till a carriage could be secretly hired to convey me over the Canadian frontier. I was now on my way thither, and had left Quebec close upon four hours. Having been only known in Canada as Mr. Skinner, Madame Morny thought there was but little danger of my apprehension, if I kept as much as possible in-doors till her husband joined us, when it would be prudent not to delay our departure for England. This was the substance of her communication, with this addition—that the money upon the table which I had won had been employed by Morny to purchase the connivance of Pipon and Leroux at my escape. We reached New York in safety, and about ten days afterwards Morny joined us there, bringing with him a printed bill, offering a large reward for the apprehension of Matthew Skinner, supposed to be a native of Baltimore, in the United States; and a long

statement, cut out of a Quebec newspaper, giving the examination of Achilles Morny, Jean Pipon, and Antoine Leroux, before the Quebec magistrates, touching the death of Aimé Bontemps. The handbill I have mislaid, if I ever had it in my own possession; the extract from the newspaper I have brought with me. Read for yourself."

I did so, with growing disquietude—the evidence given by the three men differing widely from Mr. Stretton's own version of the affair; and unquestionably, if true, fixing him with the crime of wilful murder.

"My account of the dreadful occurrence is strictly correct," said Mr. Stretton, perceiving the bad effect the reported evidence produced upon my mind. "Morny, it is true, persists that his testimony was softened in my favour, but he is a prince of liars and traitors."

"My experience has generally enabled me to distinguish the tone of language of candour and truth from those of fair-seeming guile and falsehood, and I may say that I believe you—or, at least, that my belief strongly inclines that way. Were it not so my duty would be a plain and very painful one, the death of Bontemps having taken place in a British possession."

"I knew I incurred that danger. Do you think," he added, in a low, shaking voice—"do you think that, supposing I voluntarily surrendered myself to the Quebec authorities, and the witnesses persisted in their evidence as set forth in the Quebec newspaper, that I should be convicted of the capital offence?"

"There can be no doubt that you would. Still, *magna est veritas*—and I perceive, or fancy I do, a slight gleam of light, indicating that the dark cloud may have a silver lining."

"For God's sake, do not mock me with false hopes! What, except conviction for the minor offence of manslaughter, can I hope for? And why do you so intently scrutinise the piece of newspaper?"

"A suspicion—surmise rather—glanced across my mind, which, for the present, I must keep to myself. What may be the title and the exact date of the newspaper from which the report has been cut?"

"*The Quebec Gazette*. The date of the—the—of poor

Bontemps' death was August 14th, last year. Why do you ask these questions?"

"For my own satisfaction. How was it that Morny did not bring you the whole newspaper?"

"I do not remember to have heard: but I say again, why these questions?"

"Be calm, young man, be calm. It is probable that I am mistaken in the surmise or hope which has dawned upon my mind. Miss Vignolles, I presume, does not even now share your opinion of M. Achilles Morny?"

"Very, very far from it. His address and speciousness have fascinated, enthralled her; and I dread every day to hear that he has induced her to privately wed him under some lying pretext or other. Privately, of course, to avoid the scandal of marrying whilst her uncle is scarcely cold in his bloody shroud."

"M. Morny has, I suppose, fleeced you handsomely since your return from America?"

"Enormously. In truth, he has treated me like a slave."

"Exactly. You have not made a confidant of the young lady you spoke of?"

"I have not even seen her since my return to England. Homicide as I knew myself to be, I *dared* not, Mr. Waters. It would have been another and worse crime to have continued an intimacy which would have damned the future of an amiable girl, by linking it with that of one whose life is forfeit to the law, and which dread penalty may at any hour be enforced. I have rather permitted her to believe me capricious—false; another heavy addition to the burden of shame and grief which bows me to the dust. But I will cast it off," he continued vehemently, "if life goes with it, sooner than Clara shall be the scoundrel's victim! The horrible secret stifles, kills me—I'll be poisoned with it no longer! At the worst, it will be but the sacrifice of a year or two, more or less, of shameful, hateful life!"

"Those are sounding sentences, Mr. Stretton, very easily uttered. Much more easy to say than to act out the resolution they express. Will you be here again at seven this evening?"

He would dine at the Fox and await my return.

It was so settled, and I went my way.

It would have been imprudent on my part to have prematurely excited the hopes of Mr. Stretton, with reference to the printed statement alleged to have been cut from a Quebec newspaper. The more, however, I reflected upon the subject, the stronger my suspicions grew. In the first place, I had noticed that the lines of the newspaper column were precisely parallel on both sides of the slip of paper; now, it is rare indeed that half a column can be cut out of a newspaper without the scissors running into and shearing off some portion of the matter on the other side. This, in addition to the curious circumstance that Morny had not brought the complete newspaper to Stretton at New York, suggested the possibility that so wily a gentleman might have concocted the pretended report, got it printed on a slip resembling a portion of a newspaper column, indifferent matter being furnished for the other side, which would, in such a case, be struck off with perfect evenness. Any one who had a sufficient interest to serve might easily do this, and I was now off to confirm or dissipate my suspicions, by examining the files of newspapers at the North and South American Coffee House. The handbill Morny could also easily have managed. It was at all events worth while to make inquiry.

The file of Quebec papers I found to be imperfect, especially so about the time of Bontemps' death; and I was informed by a waiter that the missing numbers had been stolen by some undetected visitor. Achilles Morny, for a thousand! was my instant conviction, and I will tell the reader why. Neither of the English Quebec papers on the file was printed with the same type as the slip which I held in my hand, containing the report. Moreover, the files of the French journals published at Quebec, and those of Montreal, had been plundered of the same numbers, or nearly so; and the New York journals made no mention whatever of the catastrophe at Le Coq. This last fact was not, however, of so much importance. Moreover, in an affair involving such tremendous issues, it, upon further reflection, occurred to me, that as I was bound to make assurance doubly sure, it would be well, if I could not find the missing papers in London, to send direct to Quebec for them. The worst was, that in those slow old days I could not receive a

reply in less than three months. There was, however, no pressing urgency for obtaining the papers, except that in the meantime Achilles Morny might espouse the niece of the venerable gentleman whom, Mr. Stretton believed, the said Morny had murdered. Was it certain, too, that the completest demonstration of Morny's turpitude, in falsely accusing her cousin of such a crime, would induce Miss Vignolles to break off the match? By no means certain. The gloze an artful scoundrel might put upon his motives in the matter—for example, a wish to drive his friend and her relative from the society of gamblers and blacklegs, by compelling him to acutely feel the possible consequences of such base companionship—would, perhaps, impose upon the weakness and credulity of a plain woman on the shady side of thirty, in love with a specious, handsome man. Too probably, I feared. Besides, I had another arrow in my quiver, which, if critically used, would—might, I should say—prove a fatal one.

"I have nothing at present to say, Mr. Stretton, in answer to your look of anxious inquiry," said I, pressing the proffered hand of the terribly agitated young man, "except that the faint gleam of cheering light I spoke of has widened, brightened, since I left you. It will be useless to press me for more than that at present. However, take heart and courage; to do so, whatever may happen, will do you no harm. Above and before all, Mr. Stretton, keep a strict, constant watch upon your cousin, Miss Vignolles, and inform me—if you decide to place yourself in my hands—without an hour's delay, and without committing yourself, remember, with M. Morny, if there is a likelihood of the abominable marriage taking place."

Mr. Stretton promised to do so, adding, that he placed implicit confidence in me; and with a lighter heart than beat in his bosom when he arrived at the Fox, he left the tavern.

I could not, with all my diligence, find the missing papers in London, and wrote therefore to Quebec for them.

I called, not long after my interview with Mr. Stretton, on Mrs. Parkins, in Half-Moon Street, Piccadilly. Her quarrelsome lodgers had not left; though, since she had ascertained (how she did so I never knew) they were not man and wife, she had given them peremptory notice to quit without delay. The

truth was, the Mornys paid well; and Mrs. Parkins dearly loved—herself remaining severely immaculate; provably so, if need be—to dabble with marriage and other correlative mysteries. This, I apprehend, was the solution of their long stay at No. 11. This by the way.

I had a long conversation with Mrs. Parkins, which afforded me many interesting items concerning the Mornys; an especially interesting one being, it struck me at the moment, that not very long before they engaged her apartments, they had been travelling in Scotland as man and wife. Before leaving I had, to a certain extent, made a confidant of Mrs. Parkins, who had undertaken, upon certain distinctly understood conditions, to carry out my instructions. The next day I forwarded her an old *Times* newspaper, which contained a *résumé* of a celebrated case, the decision in which confirmed the law or custom of Scotland, according to which any single man who acknowledges a single woman to be his wife becomes, *ipso facto*, that woman's husband.

Five or six weeks passed away before I again saw Mr. Stretton. He sought for me at Scotland Yard. I chanced to be there, and we were soon engaged in anxious consultation. Miss Vignolles, he informed me, had definitely promised to marry Achilles Morny on that very day week, and would listen to no remonstrances on her cousin's part against that disgraceful, fatal step. "The villain himself," he added, "defies, mocks me—and—and you were right, Waters; I have *not* the nerve to deliberately face the scaffold when it looms distinctly in view, bravely as you have heard me mouth of doing so."

"A very human weakness, the avowal of which shows courage. By-the-bye, were not M. Morny and Adèle St. Ange travelling together in Scotland at the beginning of the summer?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"For my own satisfaction, I again tell you, sir. Where is the marriage to take place?"

"At Bellevue House, by special licence."

"Is M. Achilles Morny in the habit of addressing Miss Vignolles by letter?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Could you manage to procure me—of course, without the lady's knowledge—a sight of some of these missives?"

"I could; *will* by to-morrow, if you desire it."

"Some one or more of them may possibly be of service. I have nothing more to say at present, Mr. Stretton, except that you may rely upon me to the full extent of my resources, zealously exerted."

The next day I received a packet of letters, the love-missives of M. Morny addressed to Miss Vignolles. What a specious, artful rascal they showed him to be! But though exceedingly warm, impassioned—that is to say, warmth, passion, were, to a certain extent, successfully simulated—I was disappointed at not finding some disparaging allusion to Adèle St. Ange. I had hoped that Miss Vignolles might have expressed some jealous contempt of that lady, the reply to which would have blown the ardent passions of St. Ange to consuming flame. As it was, I did not see that I could make effective use of them. Still, as I was going to see Mrs. Parkins, it might be as well to take two of the fiercest with me.

Mrs. Parkins was punctual to the appointment, and informed me that our clever scheme, promising as it looked, had completely broken down. She had apprised Mademoiselle St. Ange that M. Morny was certainly about to marry Miss Vignolles—an announcement which, as we had calculated, threw the lady into a frenzy of rage. Better still, when the mental tempest had in some degree subsided, and St. Ange could listen to reason, she was elated beyond measure to hear, to read for herself in the *Times*, that if, when she was travelling in Scotland with M. Morny, he had only once introduced her as his wife to witnesses that could depose to that fact, she was his lawful wife to all intents and purposes.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed, "he did so once, twice, twenty times, and notably in Glasgow, at—"

M. Morny's loud rat-tat at the street-door checked her speech, and Mrs. Parkins made a hasty retreat.

A loud, fierce altercation ensued between the "happy pair," which gradually grew milder, till their voices could no longer be heard below. After having dined M. Morny left the house,



as was his wont, but looking more lifted up, Mrs. Parkins thought, than usual.

He was hardly gone when the first-floor bell rang. Mrs. Parkins answered it, and found the lady seated at dessert, her eyes flashing with exultation.

"My good Mrs. Parkins," said she, "I wish to say to you that Morny, whom, with all his faults towards me, I still regard with tenderness, has convinced me that we never passed as man and wife in Scotland: he, the cunning rogue, having been at the time quite aware of the droll law which prevails there. I cannot, therefore, be his wife. It is a great misfortune for me; and it is time, I have reflected, that our unfortunate *liaison*, which, upon its discovery, so justly scandalised you, should cease."

"He has your consent then, madam, to marry Miss Vignolles?"

"*Hélas!* yes: What, after all, could I do? Achilles will be very rich; and he has promised me a moderate sum to re-establish myself as a *modiste* in Brussels. It is the best part for both of us."

"I remarked," continued Mrs. Parkins, "that it was probable the English lady's fortune would be strictly settled upon herself."

"No—no—no!" rejoined St. Ange, with a burst of scornful triumph; "not one penny will be settled upon herself! She adores Achilles—he is her god; and she will joyfully surrender to him, not only her mature person, but her immense riches. Poor fool!" and again she laughed viciously.

"You think then, madam, that the marriage will be an unhappy one?"

"My word of honour, no!" replied St. Ange, checking her vivacity, and speaking with pretended seriousness. "My word of honour, no: only it does seem silly for a wife to reserve nothing for herself out of so large a fortune. Nevertheless, Achilles will be a kind husband, which is lucky for her, as she will be quite at his disposition. Her rich cousin, too, Mr. Mark Stretton, is Morny's slave."

"Mr. Mark Stretton!"

"Yes, my good woman, Morny's slave; but that is a subject upon which I must not say another word. Enough that it is

true—perfectly true. But we shall not be too cruel with either of them. That is to say,” again attempting to repress her rampant insolence of triumph, “that is to say, Morny will be kind towards his wife, and have consideration for Mr. Stretton. Enough now, Mrs. Parkins. I wished to make you quite understand that the Scotch story I told you was pure imagination, that is all. We leave your lodgings early on Wednesday next. Good evening!”

“I left the room,” added Mrs. Parkins, “in a manner stunned, feeling that some dreadful mischief was on foot; but of what nature exactly I could not comprehend.”

“It is so plain, nevertheless, that he who runs may read its meaning. Adèle St. Ange convinced Morny, much against his will, I dare say, by the case reported in the *Times*, that according to the custom of Scotland (though I myself have strong doubts whether that custom applies in the case of two aliens) she was his lawful wife. He believing that, a compromise took place. St. Ange is to permit the solemnisation of Morny’s marriage with Miss Vignolles, in order that he may get her fortune, which chiefly, I understand, consists of personals, into his hands. That prime purpose effected, the duped Englishwoman will be abandoned. Morny, with his legal wife, St. Ange, as he and she believe her to be, will be off to the Continent, to avoid the penalty attached to bigamy, still keeping his fearful hold upon Mr. Stretton. That is about the essence of the programme agreed to, depend upon it.”

“Gracious Heaven! And will you be able to defeat the infamous plot?”

“I do not think I shall. Time, I fear, will beat me. I shall, however, do what I can; and do you, if you please, in the meantime keep me instantly informed of any movement on the part of your precious lodgers.”

A disastrous, most afflicting turn of affairs this! However, as I had, as usual with me, been gradually worked up by the swayings of conflicting action into taking an entirely personal interest in the affair—almost as much so as if Mr. Stretton and Miss Vignolles had been my brother and sister—I resolved, and to a certain extent succeeded, in neither losing heart nor hope.

Finding, after much cogitation, and viewing the matter in every possible light, that I was about at the end of my tether, I bethought me of consulting a shrewd old lawyer of my acquaintance; the chiefs of the force refusing, as a rule, to give directions or advice in cases involving tangled questions of law, and in which police interference is not indisputably recognised.

One of the results of that long and very depressing consultation was, that I found myself wandering about the docks on the following morning, in search of ships which hailed from Quebec. They would be numerous, and if my conjecture was well founded as to the newspaper forgery, some one amongst their crews would surely be able to tell me whether or not Aimé Bontemps, the son of a man of position in that city, had been, the year previously, murdered by drowning.

The search was a tedious one, and for a long time only so far successful that no one from Quebec that I met with had ever heard of a gentleman being flung out of the balcony-window at Le Coq, and drowned. At last, I was directed to the Old Ship Tavern, Wapping, where I should be sure to find Jean Philippe, skipper of the brig "Marie," a Quebec man, who knew everybody there.

I found Jean Philippe, but, unfortunately, he was very muzzy with liquor, and in that mulishly-cunning mood of mind common to many persons of his class when in such a condition, which renders it impossible to elicit a plain answer to a plain question. Such men always fancy you are pumping them for some concealed, selfish purpose, and wonderful is the fence with which they dodge and evade your queries; and to aggravate the annoyance, this fellow believed himself to be a humorist.

"Do you know a M. Bontemps and his son, Aimé Bontemps, at Quebec?"

"Suppose I do, and suppose I don't; what then?"

"Can you tell me if the son, Aimé Bontemps, is dead or alive?"

"Well, one or the other he is sure to be."

"Was Aimé Bontemps drowned during the autumn of last year?"

"Was Aimé Bontemps drowned during the autumn of last

year? I should say, being as he was a wild sort of a young fellow, he was hanged the spring before."

This last repartee elicited a roar of applause from the company, one of whom whispered to me that I had better see Jean Philippe early the next morning, when he would be sober, and readily afford me any information I required.

I acquiesced in that suggestion, and was leaving the Old Ship Tavern, when Jean Philippe hiccuped out, "I say, Mister Detective, you see I've fathomed you, old fellow. I say, what odds will you bet that Aimé Bontemps was drowned when the Yankee pitched him out of Le Coq into the river, or what will you take that young Bontemps only had a good ducking? Eh? Come now."

"I shall bet nothing either way, but I will do myself the pleasure of seeing you early to-morrow."

I had not, the reader will observe, said a word about "Yankee" or "Le Coq" in Jean Philippe's hearing, and the shadow of a doubt no longer rested on my mind as to the trick played upon Stretton by Achilles Morny.

Still, positive evidence thereof was indispensable. I went in quest of Jean Philippe early the next morning, and found that the "Marie" had sailed with a fair wind on the previous afternoon, about two hours after I left him.

This was exasperating, and that exasperation was increased twenty-fold when, upon my return home, I found a note from Mr. Stretton to the effect that it was all over with him and his sacrificed cousin, Clara. Morny, in consequence of a hint he had received, that an attempt would be made to prove him a married man according to the law of Scotland, had cast off all reserve, insisted that his marriage with Miss Vignolles should take place the very next day, and threatened, in the event of the slightest delay or demur, to forthwith denounce him, Mr. Stretton, as a murderer. Mademoiselle St. Ange had, moreover, been brought to Bellevue House, and had solemnly assured Miss Vignolles that no such pretended Scotch marriage had ever taken place. "Clara fully believes her, and urged alike by her liking for Morny and her fears for me, yields to the scoundrel's overbearing insistence; further declaring, that if I should be mad enough to voluntarily surrender myself to justice,

her marriage should not in consequence be delayed for one hour. Thus, you see, that if I could summon up resolution—which, God help me, I cannot do—to brave a shameful death, the fearful sacrifice would be made in vain! Hopelessly beset as I am, I have a kind of superstitious reliance upon you. The accursed ceremony will commence at eleven o'clock. Will you see me before then?—M. S.”

Mrs. Parkins, thought I, must have been babbling about that Scotch dodge; but there is no time for reproaches or regrets. I must see the lawyer again.

I arrived at Bellevue House at a little after ten the next morning. My ring at the garden-gate was answered by Mr. Stretton himself, who had watched for me from a window. He looked an image of despair, agonised by self-reproach.

“Clara,” he gasped, rather than said, “persists in her determination to marry Morny. Still, wonderful as is the ascendancy he has acquired over her, she would, I am positive, after what has passed during the last twenty-four hours, but for her fears for me, insist, at least, upon delaying the ceremonial. Ha!—here they come!”

I looked from the window of the apartment to which Mr. Stretton had stealthily conducted me, and saw an open barouche and four approaching, in which were seated Achilles Morny and Mademoiselle St. Ange!

“What!” I exclaimed, “he has the effrontery to bring that woman with him!”

“Yes, he asked Clara’s permission to do so; so that if there should be an attempt to forbid the marriage, under the pretence that the bridegroom had been married in Scotland, Mademoiselle St. Ange will be upon the spot to rebut the calumny.”

“I see. M. Morny is armed at all points, then.”

“Yes; and yet it seems to me, Waters, that your eyes sparkle as with a courageous hope.”

“You are right: a courageous, but far, very far from a confident hope. Such,” I added, affecting a stilted style of speech which would put a stopper upon prosaic questioning, “such, for example—excuse me for hazarding such a similitude—as *Ivanhoe*, though conscious of the justice of his cause, and determined to do his duty, must have felt when he rode into the lists of

Templestowe to encounter his redoubtable antagonist, Brian de Bois Guilbert. *Espérance*, nevertheless. I am not easily beaten when I am morally sure that right is on my side. As, however, the possibility of success, in this instance, requires that my onslaught should be sudden, unexpected, you must place me where I shall be out of sight, but within hearing, till the parson's first words give the *laissez aller* which will launch me full tilt against M. Achilles Morny."

Mark Stretton stared, and, I saw, fancied I must have been drinking: he, however, said nothing, which was just what I wanted; and softly led the way to the drawing-room, where the marriage ceremony was to take place. I could perceive no place of concealment therein, and we were still debating the matter, when footsteps quickly approaching necessitated decision, and I vanished behind a high cabinet piano. The footsteps proved to be those of a servant bringing a message from Miss Vignolles to her cousin. She wished to speak with him forthwith, and he, of course, at once obeyed the summons.

It was not so bad a place of concealment, after all, except for my legs, and they were pretty well concealed by two large lyre-shaped pedals: only a person stooping down could possibly see them. If, indeed, any of the company came round the piano—why, then, like the theatrical machinist, not being able to snow white, I should be obliged to snow brown!

At last the tedious watch-hands marked the hour of eleven, and a few minutes after the bridal party entered the room, and seated themselves. The bride, starting back upon the brink of the precipice, sobbed wofully; a manifestation of feeling which the soft, but stern, low tones of M. Achilles Morny rebuked, and *registered*.

A few painful minutes passed, and then entered the Reverend Mr. — and his clerk. The company stood up, and the clergyman commanded the doors to be thrown open: that was done, and the ceremony began.

"Dearly beloved—"

"It is needless," said I, stepping to the front—"it is needless to read further. I am a police-officer, and the bridegroom, Achilles Morny, is wanted."

Amazement, consternation, could never, I suppose, have been

more vividly depicted than by the faces and attitudes of all assembled there.

The clergyman was the first to speak. "What," he asked, "is the meaning of this? If you ——"

"Ha! ha!" interrupted Morny, who had by then recognised me—"it is that *scélérat*, Waters! He that will have it I was married in Scotland! Adèle," he added, stepping towards the woman, who, for decency's sake, stood some distance apart, "Adèle, thou wilt——"

Affecting to misunderstand his movement, I seized him by the collar. "Dare to stir, sir, and I will handcuff you!" and I took a pair of handcuffs from my pocket.

The fellow was dumfounded, and I went on. "I arrest you, Achilles Morny, for felony—for robbing Mr. Mark Stretton of several thousand pounds by threats of accusing him of a capital crime."

"My God!——"

The fellow's eyes quailed beneath mine; the hue of his face was that of a corpse; I felt doubly sure that I was right.

"That accusation, Achilles Morny, you supported by a forged newspaper ——. Ah! you force me to it, then!"—and, after a short struggle, I clasped the iron cuffs upon his wrists. "You the while knowing well that Aimé Bontemps was and is alive and well! But we waste words. Come along, and at once;" and I pushed him towards the door with much greater violence than I should have used had it not been my cue to stun, confound him. I succeeded.

"Mercy! mercy!" he screamed, bursting away from me, and casting himself at the feet of Miss Vignolles, who, like her cousin, seemed stricken into stone. "Mercy, Clara! I swear to you by all that is holy, sacred, by my love, my devotion, to you, that I intended—our union once consecrated—to admit, to proclaim that Aimé Bontemps was not drowned, and is alive and well! Yes, I swear that——"

"That will do, M. Achilles Morny," I interrupted; "and in recompense of your volunteered confession, I will relieve you of the handcuffs."

"Thunder of hell! Then you did not know that—that——"

"Right! I did *not* know, till you confessed it, that the news-

paper paragraph was a forgery; and but for your very candid avowal, we should have been scarcely able to detain you more than an hour or two. You have saved us trouble, and now come along."

The volley of cursing rage which my words elicited was really something awful, and feeling as I did how extremely painful the scene must be to Miss Vignolles, I bore Achilles Morny away by sheer force.

When he was taken before a magistrate the next morning some slight evidence was given, and a remand requested, which, as a matter of course, was granted. Mr. Stretton's solicitor, who had shaped the charge as one of obtaining money under false pretences—it being perfectly competent to him to prefer the graver charge of felony at a future period—the solicitor for the prosecution did not, I say, object to the prisoner being admitted to bail. Bail was accordingly granted, and strange as it may seem to those who have never been behind the scenes of a Police Theatre, responsible tradesmen, who had never before heard of Achilles Morny, came forward to bail him in very heavy recognisances.

This was much the wisest course. Mark Stretton had almost deserved the suffering and loss he had undergone; and for Miss Vignolles' sake it was desirable that Morny should flee the country, which he very speedily did. As to the alleged crime at Clifton, not the faintest proof thereof could have been obtained. Perhaps, too, after all, Mark Stretton's suspicion was unfounded. If not, we may be sure that the crime, though unseen by human eyes, was witnessed by Him who said, "Vengeance is mine: I will repay."





## CHAPTER XV.

## THE DRAMATIC AUTHOR.

DURING my third year of service in the force I was a frequent visitor in the evenings at the Wrekin Tavern, an establishment well known to most Londoners. My especial business there was to be on the watch for a certain tradesman, whose predilection for convivial, and particularly theatrical society, had led him step by step to distaste for and neglect of his business, and finally to a ruin of a deeper dye than inability to meet pecuniary obligations commonly involves. I waited and watched in vain : Mr. Stephen H—— did not again show himself at his once favourite place of resort, and ultimately effected his escape to America, though the pursuit after him was very hot indeed. As far, therefore, as he was concerned, my time was thrown away, and I should have escaped much disquietude had these visits to the Wrekin been wholly barren in professional experience.

It was not to be so : one of the *habitués* of the place was a young and quite unmistakeable Celt, though his name, which I need not write at length, was a common English one. His face was intellectual rather than handsome, but there was much spiritual beauty in his dark eyes and flashing smile. He had, I was told, taken a degree at Trinity College, Dublin, had written with success in the fugitive literature of that capital, and about four months previously to my night-acquaintance with him arrived in London with the manuscript of a five-act tragedy, acceptance of which by the management of one of the large theatres he was still awaiting with a nervous impatience, strongly dashed with misgiving, notwithstanding that all those amongst his tavern associates to whom he had read the play were unanimously of opinion that it was a work of wondrous genius. C—

was a prime favourite with the frequenters of the Wrekin; quick in repartee, and an ever-flowing fount of genial, if not very exquisite humour. He sang well, too; and one particular song, said to be his own composition both in words and music, twice or thrice during the same evening. It did not much impress me with an idea of his skill as a writer of ballads, it being a mere echo of the sensuous sweetness of Moore's songs, and its main gist to persuade the fair one to whom it was addressed that true wisdom consisted in enjoying herself whilst she could, forasmuch that, though her lips were roses, her eyes stars, her breath the sighs of flowerets in heaven, she might die ere the morrow! Nothing very new or striking in that, it seemed to me. His dramatic genius might, however, be of a higher order than his song power, and if so, I sincerely hoped that its successful manifestation would not be long delayed; for, even to a stranger, it was a sad sight to see a man of evidently great promise so wasting, soiling his golden prime; brightening, night after night, the thick smoke of intoxication with flashes of a genius which, if possibly unequal to the creation of a great tragedy, was certainly of a diviner quality than is vouchsafed to the ordinary run of educated men. The Helicon, the draughts of which I had read inspired or stimulated the poetic soul, was not, I felt quite sure, brandy and water.

There were other circumstances which quickened the sort of languid interest which from the first I felt in the gifted young Irishman. He was himself well dressed, and appeared to be tolerably well supplied with money. His board, I suspected, cost very little; his drink expenses, including frequent treats to others, could not certainly exceed fifteen, or say twenty shillings, per diem—outgoings which a small legacy he had come into possession of just before he left Dublin sufficed as yet to meet. But there was an elderly, grey-haired man, almost constantly sitting by his side at the Wrekin, whose threadbare habiliments and niggardly expenditure contrasted strangely with the fashionable apparel and lavish outlay of the young man, for whom he evidently felt the tenderest regard, the highest admiration. I noticed that Dobbs, as he was called—(he was, I heard, a now shelved actor, who had been the original Dobbs in some play or farce)—I noticed, I say, that Dobbs

would sit for hours over one glass of ale or porter, almost constantly refused to be treated by the thoughtless author, and ever when the hour arrived—a sufficiently late one—for the departure of the general company, made use of every means of persuasion in his power—tears in his fading eyes, the name of Aileen (which, imperfectly overhearing, I mistook for Ellen), trembling from his thin, shrivelled lips—to induce him to go home, rarely with success. I felt a great respect for the original Dobbs. He might be a bad actor, but he certainly was a true gentleman, spite of his seedy clothes, his utter poverty, and the contaminating associations with which that poverty had forced him into contact.

I wished, in a half-careless way, to know something more of him and his connection with C——, and with that view questioned one Roberts, a conspicuous frequenter of the Wrekin, and, I was informed, a provincial actor of unquestionable talent, against whom so unaccountable a prejudice prevailed amongst the metropolitan managers, that he had never been able to obtain a London engagement. Now, I had closely observed this Roberts, in consequence of a vague notion I entertained that I had somewhere seen him under discreditable circumstances—not, however, being able, after much trying, to remember when or where; and he evidently having no recollection of me, I concluded that a real or fancied resemblance to another person had misled me.

“Is Dobbs, as you call him, related to C——?” I asked, amidst the clink and clatter attending the replenishment of pipes, pots, and glasses, at the conclusion of an uproariously-applauded song.

“Not yet,” replied Roberts, in a tone as guarded as my own. “Not yet; but if C——’s play be accepted and prove successful—and I hope my head will never ache till then—they will no doubt be father and son-in-law.”

“Dobbs has a daughter, then, whom C—— is courting?”

“Yes; and a very nice girl indeed is Aileen M’Grath, but possessed of no more talent for the stage, which, till C—— fell in her way, she was intended for, than her stick of a father. As to the play itself, which is to make all their fortunes,” continued Roberts, “it will never be accepted by any manager who has not lost his senses, and this the fellows here who praise it

to the skies, and who will drain the conceited Celt of his last shilling before they have done with him, know as well as I do; ay, and they will tell him so too, when that last shilling is spent: not, probably, till then. C—— is as devoid of true dramatic genius," added Roberts, touching the empty glass before him with the end of his pipe, "as this glass is of brandy and water."

I understood the hint quite well, but, as I had paid for the last tumbler, I did not see the expediency of acting upon it. The disappointment was a transient one.

"Roberts," said C——, who had left the room for a few minutes, and was passing us on returning to his seat, "Roberts, you will take a glass—two if you will—with me this evening?"

"Thou ace of trumps, I will!" exclaimed Roberts, jumping up, and grasping C——'s hand with a natural assumption of friendship and esteem decisive of his talent as an actor; "thou ace of trumps, I will! Ace of hearts, as well as trumps, I should have said."

"Let me tell you," interrupted C——, "why I am in such capital spirits to-night. I met Harley this afternoon, and he assured me that my play has been read in the green-room to the chiefs of the company by Charles Kemble, and that a most favourable opinion has been expressed; some even predicting that its success will equal that of Knowles' *Virginus*."

"Why, of course it will!" was Robert's prompt rejoinder: "men are not stocks and stones; they have powers of appreciation; and knowing, as we all do, that Knowles' play was made by Macready's acting—that acting itself mere melodramatic strutting and spouting, by the way—the superior success of yours is not to be doubted. Waiter," added Mr. Roberts, as that functionary came up, and C—— passed to his place; "two hot brandies and water for me—Mr. C—— pays. Shillings-worths, mind."

The order given, Mr. Roberts relit his pipe, favoured me with an expressive wink, and resumed his former strain of scampish malignity, which I interrupted by a curt "Good-night."

During the next two months I looked in at the Wrekin two or three times a week, if I happened to be passing near; almost invariably found C—— there, and knew without inquiring that the fate of his play was still undecided. His clothes were

getting seedy, his watch and a diamond breast-pin had disappeared, and his bright young life seemed to be passing under the shadow of a great eclipse. The fire of his wit and humour flashed faintly at intervals only, and it was plainly manifest that the mental and moral wreck of a fine mind could only be averted by the speedy realization of the dream of success and fame by which he had been lured from the safe, beaten path of life. The original Dobbs, I observed, was still hopeful, or affected to be so; but his cheerful commonplaces fell upon ears deafened with each passing day to such windy consolation. Several times I was about to counsel the misguided young man to break away at all hazard from the thralldom of a dreaming idleness, and get to work of some sort—literary work, if none other were within his reach—but the half-formed words remained unspoken. What right had I to obtrude advice upon a person with whom I had never exchanged a word? It would have been sheer impertinence to do so.

It was in the stars, nevertheless, that C—— and I should be brought into close communication with each other. It came to pass thus wise.

The day when acceptance or rejection of the play by the Covent Garden management was to be definitively announced had arrived, and C—— awaited at the Wrekin with fierce restlessness the coming of the managerial missive which would decide his fate.

The afternoon had passed away, and evening was wearing late; still it came not, though Roberts, who had volunteered to go and question the stage-manager as to the reason of the delay, had been gone more than an hour. At last Dobbs, unable to bear the cruel suspense any longer, jumped up and left the room, declaring that he would see Mr. Charles Kemble himself, and be back in no time.

He had been gone about ten minutes only when Roberts bounced into the room. Instantly there was a dead silence; the smokers put down their pipes, and C——, trembling in every limb, staggered, as it were, to his feet, and with ashen lips quivered out, "Well?"

"It is *not* well, I am sorry to say," replied Roberts, with a miserable affectation of sympathy. "Mr. Harley is grieved to

say that the play has been rejected, and adds, that the MS. will be returned this evening or early to-morrow."

Poor C—— fell down in his seat as if shot, looked round with a wild, ghastly stare, and burst into a fit of laughter! One of the company sitting near proffered him a full glass of hot spirits and water, which he emptied at a gulp. It appeared to still his agitation; and looking round, as if his purpose needed excuse, he muttered some half-incoherent words, to the effect "that after such news he must take a draught of fresh air to revive himself;" and as his fevered eyes met mine in passing me (he knew my vocation), he added, "that he should be back in five minutes, or less."

A vague apprehension of the purpose for which he was hurrying away crossed my mind, and after a lapse of two or three minutes I started up to go in quest of the unfortunate youth.

As I opened the door to go out, I was almost knocked off my legs by the sudden inrush of Dobbs in a state of tremendous excitement, and waving a paper triumphantly aloft.

"Hurra!" he screamed; "hurra! The play will be put in rehearsal immediately. Where's C——?"

Half-a-dozen voices replied that he would be back immediately; and it was then angrily demanded of Roberts why he had just before announced, upon the authority of Mr. Harley, that the play was rejected.

"I did not say of my own knowledge that Mr. Harley had so expressed himself," sullenly rejoined Roberts. "Franks was my informant. I spoke after him."

"Then Franks is a liar!" cried Dobbs. "Here is the genuine article in black and white!" again triumphantly waving aloft the paper in his hand. He next read it with asthmatic stops, adding, "Here it is in black and white, written by Mr. Charles Kemble himself, and given me unsealed, because there was no wax or wafer at hand:—

"Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

"Mr. Charles Kemble presents his compliments to Mr. C——, and is happy to inform him that his admirable play has been definitively accepted by the management, and will be immediately put in rehearsal. If Mr. C—— can make it convenient to call to-morrow at the Theatre, between twelve and two, Mr. Charles Kemble will confer with him upon the business arrangements consequent upon the acceptance of the play."

"That's conclusive, I rather think—a little about the edges!" continued Dobbs. "But why does not C—— return? Surely he cannot be gone home already!"

"No—no—no," was the chorus answer; and Dobbs went on to relate in detail his interview with the great Mr. Kemble. I stayed not to hear him, the apprehension which the peculiar expression of C——'s face as he passed out of the room had excited, coming back upon me, as minute after minute passed away, with augmented force.

I vainly sought for him about the purlieus of the tavern; and as I had made myself acquainted with the whereabouts of his domicile, I stepped briskly in that direction, my sharp walk presently accelerated to a run. Henrietta Street was no great distance, and I soon ascertained he had not been there since he left in the morning. I hurried back as swiftly to see if he had returned to the Wrekin. A few yards from the tavern I met a police-officer, and asked him if he had seen a tall young man, wearing a short cloak and a kind of military fur-cap. Yes, he had, about five minutes before, leaning against a lamp-post in Catherine Street. The officer thought he was tipsy, accosted him, and was rudely repulsed, and the man went on his way with a feeble, staggering pace, but not so much so as to justify police interference. "He was going towards the Strand," added the officer, calling after me. I had concluded so; the mode, in this instance, of accomplishing the mischief which is so swift to enter into the thoughts of desperate men having instinctively, as it were, suggested itself to my mind.

The night was bleak and gusty; there were very few persons abroad; the clouded moon afforded barely sufficient light to dimly distinguish objects in the distance; and it was not till I had crossed the Strand at the end of Catherine Street, and proceeded some way along Waterloo Place, that I fancied—believed—I saw Mr. C——. A tall man was standing on the kerb, within a dozen paces of the end of the bridge. Presently a phaeton came rapidly through the gate, the brilliant lamps of which shone for a moment full upon the man's face, and I knew I was not mistaken. C—— was standing still; his suicidal intent, as I judged, checked by the tremendous "perhaps," which makes calamity of such long life. I feared to resolve

that hesitation in a fatal sense by showing myself till I was within grappling distance. A false pride would, I dreaded, prompt him to consummate the dreadful purpose of which he would instantly be aware he was suspected.

I therefore crept cautiously along, keeping myself as much as possible in shadow, and had got within perhaps twenty paces of him when he suddenly started off at a run, and passed through the revolving bridge-wicket. I followed hard, but he heard not, or, at least, appeared not to hear my pursuing steps, and I soon neared him sufficiently to be able to frustrate the design of which I suspected him, should he attempt to put it in execution.

He did attempt to do so, near the middle of the bridge, and in another half minute would have been over the parapet, and whelmed in the deep waters of the river. I caught him first by the cloak, which came away in my hand. The pull, fortunately, checked his spring, and the next moment I seized him firmly round the body, and drew him by main force off the parapet on to the bridge.

"D——n ! who are you ? And how dare you interfere with me ?" he exclaimed. "Loose your hold, or by the living God——"

"Do not, Mr. C——, take the name of the living God in vain at such a moment. It is useless to struggle. If you persist in doing so I must summon assistance, though I wish to spare you the exposure which——"

"Ha ! I know you now !" he interrupted. "You are the police-fellow who has frequented the Wrekin for some months past. You are a devilish clever, lynx-eyed chap, they say, and know, perhaps, as well as I do, that I am not only trodden down into the mire of poverty, but am trembling on the very verge of infamy."

"I know nothing—suspect nothing of the kind, Mr. C——. A young man, with good health and fine talents, is very silly, it seems to me, to attempt drowning himself for nothing of more moment than a passing literary disappointment ! Besides," I added, "that fellow Roberts is one whose assertion I would not value at a button's worth. I do not believe he has seen Mr. Harley, or that your play has been rejected."



"What is that?" exclaimed C——, stopping short, and peering eagerly in my face. We were by then slowly returning towards Waterloo Place. "What is that?"

"Before I say another word, Mr. C——, you must give me your word, as a gentleman, that you will never again, under any circumstances, attempt suicide. If you refuse to do so, you will have to appear in the morning before a magistrate."

"Yes—yes. I promise, upon the word of a gentleman (with bitter emphasis upon 'gentleman'). And now, what meant you about Roberts? Your tone and look intimated more, much more than your words. Speak," he added, in a quick, trembling voice. "Do not keep me in suspense, nor mock me!"

I at once ran over what had occurred at the Wrekin after he left, and repeated pretty nearly the very words of Mr. Charles Kemble's note.

He listened with suspended breath; and when my voice ceased, and he felt that what I had said was the truth, his high-strung nerves gave way, and he leant for support upon the balustrade, sobbing like a child.

Now the circumstances did not, to my prosaic mind, warrant—explain, such emotion; and the sentence, "trembling on the very verge of infamy," which, when uttered by him, had jarred unpleasantly on my ear, recurred painfully. No doubt the young man was in debt; but even should his play prove unremunerative, which I knew enough of such matters to be aware was quite possible, unliquidated liabilities did not usually involve infamy.

C—— presently grew calmer, and we walked on. I took the liberty of advising him not to return to the Wrekin that night. I would myself look in and bring out Dobbs. He took my counsel; and after I had given him my private address, he and the original Dobbs, now much mystified by my budding intimacy with his son-in-law elect, took their joyous way homeward.

Shortly afterwards the play was advertised in the newspapers and playhouse placards, and was, as well as I could judge, strongly cast.

A few days before the decisive night I received twelve free tickets for the theatre, with Mr. and Mrs. C——'s compliments. C—— had then married Aileen M'Grath, upon the strength of his yet problematical success as a playwright! A rash venture

it seemed at the first blush ; and yet, if the marriage rescued him from his Wrekin associates, it might turn out to be the most prudent step he could have taken.

As, if I myself should be able to witness the performance, three tickets were all we could make use of, I called at Henrietta Street to return the remainder, which might be more advantageously disposed of. I was then introduced to Mrs. C——, a most sprightly, amiable young woman, with about as loveable a face and figure as one could wish to meet with. Her eyes, I well remember, were of the grey-blue colour, peculiar, as far as my observation has gone, to Irishwomen ; and her nose, slightly *retroussé*, added wonderfully to the arch expression of her bright face. No coming sinister event cast the faintest shadow upon her clear young brow, and I sincerely hoped, though with much misgiving, that the moral sunshine which illumined her new home would be perennial.

C——, who was going to the theatre, left with me. Once out of the sight and hearing of his wife, the buoyant gaiety he had assumed in her presence suddenly subsided into a stern, gloomy sadness. In reply to my look, questioning the reason of such a change, he muttered something about the precariousness of his position ; adding, in a tone of petulant discontent—

“The truth is, Waters, I begin to think I have made a fool of myself, which, by-the-bye, I have a knack of doing, with respect to money arrangements. The Covent Garden management offered me two hundred pounds down for my play, or four hundred if it should run ten consecutive nights, and I—I accepted and signed the latter proposal.”

“And rightly so, I should think.”

“Well, yes, under ordinary circumstances ; but the truth is, that I *must* have one hundred pounds within a fortnight of to-morrow. Should I fail in obtaining it, I shall curse you with my last breath for your interference on the bridge. You need not,” he added, forcing a faint laugh, “you need not fix that ‘detective’ look so sternly upon my face. My position is exactly this : a fortnight ago I took up an acceptance for fifty pounds ; an accommodation acceptance, which I had discounted with a City house trading largely with Dublin, by an acceptance by the same party for one hundred pounds at a month, receiving,

of course, the difference, without which I could not have married Aileen. The discounters know the circumstances of the acceptor very well. You understand, therefore, that the bill must be paid at maturity."

"Must be paid by you at maturity; because otherwise your friend, the acceptor, might be sued. That is all you fear?"

"What the devil else do you suppose I fear?" he exclaimed, taking care, however, that I should not see his face. "That is fear enough, I think. It struck me," he added more quietly, "that you might know some party who would advance me, in case of necessity, the hundred pounds, upon my legal assignment of my, of course hypothetical, claim upon the Covent Garden management for four hundred pounds."

"I am not acquainted with any such party. The acceptor of the one hundred-pound bill," I added, "would, of course, be glad to enter into the arrangement, the realisation of the said hypothetical claim being, you say, your only chance of relieving him of his actual responsibility."

"The old skinflint would not do it," burst out poor C—, with incautious vehemence, "to save his nephew from the gallows!"

"His nephew!"

"Ay; didn't I tell you an uncle was the acceptor? But here we are at the stage-entrance to the theatre. Good morning."

I understood better now the purport of the phrase "trembling upon the very verge of infamy." Still it was but a suspicion, after all, from which I drew such frightful conclusions—a suspicion, moreover, which I had no inclination to test the soundness of.

Covent Garden Theatre was full, though not crowded, on the decisive night, and the play, which I thought manifested considerable poetic power, of a didactic kind, but of which the dramatic interest, such as it was, could neither have hurried the pulse nor suffused the eyes of the most susceptible of the auditors, was well enough received, and given out for repetition amidst general but languid applause. It was, I felt, a great pity that C— had not taken the two hundred pounds. His play, I more than feared, would never run the ten consecutive nights.

It was withdrawn after the sixth representation; and about noon

on the day I saw that announcement placarded I looked in at the Wrekin, with the anxious purpose of hearing tidings of the practically unsuccessful dramatic author. To my great surprise C—— was there, in the highest spirits. Leaving his chums, he beckoned me apart, and informed me that his play was temporarily withdrawn, to be shortened, by himself of course, and otherwise rendered more telling as an acting play. "And," added C——, "the management have this very morning paid me one hundred guineas down for the copyright."

"You have lost no time then, I suppose, in taking up your uncle's acceptance?"

"I have sought to do so," he replied, flushing scarlet; "but the City firm have paid it away. It will be due the day after to-morrow, and will, no doubt, turn up in due course. It is payable at my own place, and I shall therefore have no trouble about it. Will you," he added, "stay and take a glass or two of wine with a few friends I expect here presently?"

I abruptly declined the invitation, and left the house. The rest of the day was spent in the performance of duties which kept me in the immediate neighbourhood, and my way home lying past the Wrekin, I dropped in to speak and reason with C——, who, I remembered, with much uneasiness, if but for his young wife's sake, had probably the hundred guineas in his pocket.

There was not one person in the general room, and ordering a glass of ale, I took occasion to ask the waiter what had become of the usual company, and especially of Mr. C——.

"He went away two or three hours ago with a whole lot of them," was the reply. "They are gone to a billiard-room hereabouts, where Mr. C—— and Roberts are to play a dozen games of sixty up for five pounds a game."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, greatly startled. "Why, C—— must be downright mad!"

"That's about it," replied the man; "though it ain't for me, of course, to holler about what gents do with their money. Roberts," he added, confidentially, "though he swore he knew nothing scarcely about the game—hadn't played it, in fact, for ever so many years—will polish Mr. C—— off in style, depend upon it—though Mr. C—— is, I hear, a fine player. Between ourselves," continued the waiter, with deepening confidence, "Mr. Roberts

is a gent that don't mind acting as a billiard-marker at a slap-up West-end establishment when he's out of luck and an engagement; and that, I've a notion, is one reason why the respectable theatrical gents fight shy of him. He has got, however," added the loquacious servitor, "a prime engagement at the Theatre Royal, Liverpool: eight guineas a-week, I'm told—no less; and starts to-morrow or next day. It's a pity for poor C——'s sake—who is a real gentleman, and no mistake—that he didn't start yesterday."

"Had C——, who you say is a fine player, taken much wine when he left to play the match with Roberts?"

"He had, sir."

"Do you know where the slap-up West-end billiard establishment, at which Mr. Roberts has sometimes assisted as marker, is situated?"

"I do not. It's pretty much hearsay I've been a letting on, you must understand; and in course," the man added, with his finger on his lip, "mum's the word between us two, whether it's all gospel or not."

I nodded assent, and exit waiter.

I was cudgelling my brains once more as to where I had seen Roberts, the waiter's hint as to his occasional vocation as billiard-marker having narrowed the range of police-vision over which my memory glanced, and the man's face was dimly surging into recollection, when a tumult of voices was heard from without, quickly succeeded by the inrush of seven or eight men all speaking together; the loudest and fiercest being C——, whom the others were striving to soothe into resigned acquiescence in the loss of fifty pounds, which Roberts had got from him by billiard-sharpping. C—— was mad with rage—drunk with wine and passion; rage against himself, not against the winner of his money, he evidently having no suspicion that he had been the victim of unfair play—unfair in this particular, that your opponent, knowing himself to be a superior player, against whom you positively have not the ghost of a chance, pretends that he knows little or nothing about the game. The only word-sedative to which C—— was not wholly insensible was a promise, many times iterated, that Roberts would give him his "revenge" the next day!

I listened in sad silence, knowing as I did that I was witnessing a fearful tragedy, upon the last act of which the curtain was about to rise. C—— drank furiously—tossed brandy down his throat as if he therewith hoped to quench the fiery arrows of remorse—to sweep from his burning brain the images of ruin, shame, despair, which I could not doubt were trooping through it with ceaseless continuity.

At last I interposed. Rising abruptly, I approached C——, touched him on the arm, and said I wished to—nay, that I *would* see him home at once. He had not observed me before, and my sudden appearance greatly startled him. I comprehended the mortal fear which, in his half-frenzied state, whitened his flushed face and shook his frame, and I hastened to say, “It’s getting late, Mr. C——; you are not yourself, and I will see you home.”

He complied with the helpless submissiveness of a child, and, taking his arm within mine to steady him, we left the place. Neither of us, I think, spoke till we were at the door of No. 2, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden.

“You will say nothing to my wife?” he whispered.

“Nothing that is not absolutely necessary to be said. I shall tell her that you have fifty pounds about you, which she must take possession of, and that I shall be here early to-morrow.”

The door opened before C—— could make any reply; he was got to bed, and I had a conference with Mrs. C—— and her father. A very painful one. I did not want to talk about the one hundred pounds acceptance—to know anything concerning it, except as to the means of meeting it on the next day but one. “There are no means,” sobbed the pale, nervous wife; “none—no resource—no hope! Oh, my husband!” saying which, she swooned in her father’s arms; and he, too, was crying like a child.

The next morning I was told that C—— was delirious, and that a serious attack of brain-fever was apprehended. I learned, also, that had he avoided the snare set for him by Roberts, prosperous and happy days were, in all likelihood, in store for him and his; a note having been received from the manager of a great morning paper, offering C—— a reportership in the

"Gallery"—as reporting the speeches of noble lords and honourable members is, I believe, technically termed—at a weekly salary of five guineas, C——'s stenographic skill being, I had before heard, remarkable.

What was to be done? What could I do to compel that rascal Roberts to refund the fifty pounds, of which he had swindled C——? Ay, and to refund the fifty pounds before twenty-four hours had passed away! That was the question of questions!

The ransack of my memory anent Roberts had at last suggested that I had seen him at the Marlborough Street Police Office, as a prisoner in a gambling case, of which Kearns, a very active officer, had the management. I could remember nothing of the result of the investigation; but there could certainly be no harm, and might be much good, in advising with Kearns as to the present very pressing matter.

I did so; and at about half-past eleven in the forenoon Kearns and I—having previously matured our plan of action—entered the public room of the Wrekin, where we found Mr. Roberts. He was in splendid feather. The successful swindle of the previous day, and his engagement at the Theatre Royal, Liverpool, had puffed him up amazingly; and he was unusually mouthy, boastful, and ostentatiously generous. He was gracious enough to present me with a glass of wine. I declined the favour, and he then offered it to my companion. Clever actor as he might be, he never made a more natural start of surprise and consternation than when he recognised Kearns.

"Mr. Calvert, I believe," said Kearns, not too loud—"a gentleman whom I once had the honour to——"

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Roberts. "Step this way," he added, after a flurried glance at the company. "I have a word to say to you in private."

He led the way to an adjoining room, whither, after conferring together, we followed.

Roberts had already ordered in wine, which he pressed us to partake of.

"I shall take nothing at your expense, nor with you," said Kearns: "you have been at your old swindling tricks again, I hear."

"What right have you to address me in that style?" retorted Roberts, endeavouring to put on a frontlet of defiance.

"*Your* style won't do for me, my fine fellow," rejoined Kearns; "so you had better not try it on. The state of the case is this," continued Kearns, "and no two ways about it. A certain person, Calvert *alias* Roberts by name, was detected in swindling a rich young greenhorn by billiard-sharping; also of having palmed off upon a drunken country yokel a note of the Bank of Elegance for a genuine twenty-pound note. Well, neither of the two cheated gents would appear against Calvert *alias* Roberts; that respectable individual having, with as many oaths as would fill a bushel basket, sworn to leave off his swindling ways and live honestly for the future. Well, now, here it is; I know where to drop upon one of them bamboozled gents in less than half an hour—my friend Waters keeping you company the while; and when I inform said bamboozled gent that you have been and robbed a poor fellow of fifty pounds by the old dodge, it strikes me you'll be likely to make your appearance in Marlborough Street, instead of the Theatre Royal, Liverpool."

This bounce on the part of my friend Kearns was very well done; but judging from the dogged expression which, as he was speaking, overgrew Roberts's face, I, more than doubting its success, struck in before he could reply:

"One effect of which appearance at Marlborough Street, in your real name of Roberts, would be to certainly put an end to your Liverpool engagement, even supposing that the evidence should in a legal sense break down; which could, however, hardly be, fortified as it would be by yesterday's billiard-sharping."

This was too plain to be disputed, and Roberts's countenance fell wofully.

"In neither of the cases mentioned," he presently said, "did I commit any fraud; and I cannot believe that in this country the criminal law can be put in motion to force a man—for I see your object—to refund his fair winnings."

"We have nothing to do, Mr. Roberts, with your refunding of fair or unfair winnings. You will act in that respect as you think fit. Meanwhile, my friend Kearns will go and seek out



the party who declined to prosecute on a former occasion, and whilst he is gone, though I may not take Calvert *alias* Roberts into custody, I shall certainly not lose sight of him. Be as quick as you can, Kearns," I added. The officer said he should be back in no time, and hurried off.

"This insolent humbug does not impose upon me," said Roberts: "not a bit of it; and were it not for the public scandal, and the probable loss, in consequence, of the Liverpool engagement, I would see you both in flames before I would part with a penny of my lawful winnings."

"I have nothing, I again say, to do with your lawful or unlawful winnings; but as certainly as that you are a practised blackleg, I shall immediately advise Mr. C—— to apply for a summons against you; and I have no doubt that he will forthwith act upon that advice."

"D—n you and your advice!" exclaimed Roberts, with choking rage: "I am in a cursed fix, and yet——"

"I shall go and speak to Mr. C—— at once," said I, rising to go. "Prompt action in all such cases is advisable, and we shall always be able to find Mr. Roberts, otherwise Calvert, in Liverpool or elsewhere."

I then left, and walked towards Henrietta Street, still very dubious as to the result. Mr. C——, his wife told me, was much calmer, and I had barely time to caution her not to speak of his illness, or to accept of less than the fifty pounds, when there was a violent ring at the first-floor bell, and peeping through the blind, the original Dobbs announced that Roberts was at the door.

"Mrs. C——," said that worthy, still in a flaming rage, "that insolent puppy of a peeler, Waters, is, I know, now with your husband, trying to persuade him to trump up a charge of cheating against me, knowing well, as he does, that such a charge—false, absurd as it is—would just now utterly blast my prospects. I therefore return the fifty pounds which I fairly won of your husband; under solemn protest, mind you. Here are the identical notes, and the devil give you joy of them."

Victory! Hurra!

The terrible bill was duly paid upon presentation next day. At least, I judged so from the renewed brightness of Mrs.

C——'s countenance when I called in the evening. An hour or thereabouts previously I had the honour of touching my hat to Mr. Roberts, in response to that gentleman's clenched fist shaken savagely at me from the box-seat of the Liverpool night-coach.

Mr. and Mrs. C—— emigrated with their young family, some six or seven years after the occurrences I have roughly penned; with much advantage, I have reason to believe, to their fortunes. The original Dobbs went with them.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE TWO WIDOWS.

THE quiet enjoyment with my wife and children of Christmas-day, 1835, was broken in upon by Inspector Thomas, with a message from Colonel Rowan, the then Chief Commissioner, requiring me to first make myself thoroughly master of the papers sent to me by Thomas, and that done, forthwith place myself in confidential communication with two ladies; one a Mrs. Hughes, whom I should find at the Clarendon, Bond Street; the other, Mrs. Lister, who was staying at Osborne's Hotel, in the Adelphi. Mrs. Lister would see me at any time, but it was requisite that I should wait upon Mrs. Hughes before her dinner hour, seven o'clock. Above all, I was to be scrupulously careful that neither of the ladies should for a moment suspect that I was in correspondence with the other.

"It's a tangled skein to unravel," remarked Thomas, after delivering the Commissioner's message. "There are, it seems, two widows of one gentleman, one son of both, and lots of 'tin' depending upon the result."

"Two widows of one gentleman! one son of two widows! You are jesting, of course."

"Not a bit of it. There are two sets of lawyers, too, in the case. Here are their names and addresses. Smith and Smith, of Gray's Inn, Mrs. Hughes's attorneys; and Messrs. Jones and Son, of Bedford Row, who are acting for Mrs. Lister. And mind, you must be as careful," continued the inspector, "to keep Jones and Son in the dark as to your being in consultation with Smith and Smith, and *vice versâ*, as you will be with respect to the widows. You'll find, I fancy," Thomas went on to say, "that you are expected to be a sort of second Solomon ;

with this difference, however, that instead of ordering the boy, when you've got him, to be divided between the two mothers, you, after arriving at a settled conviction upon the case, are at once to go in, back and edge, against the party in the wrong, in conjunction naturally with the right party's attorneys. You must, however, the Commissioner insists, be dead sure of your game before showing your hand to the lawyers."

Thomas, who seemed to enjoy, in a mild way, the vexation which his errand at such a time caused me, added the compliments of the season, and left me to the enjoyment of the bundle of papers he had placed before me. Indulgence in ill-temper would avail nothing, so, resolutely buckling to at the task assigned me, I had, by nine in the evening, fully possessed myself of the details of the affair as set forth in the papers, and by the *viva voce* additions and corrections supplied by the two widows, whom I duly visited at their temporary abodes.

In order to render the perplexing maze of circumstance, conjecture, and suspicion, at all plain to the reader, I must begin at the beginning of the complicated involvement—about ten years, that is to say, previous to the Christmas-day when the agency of the Detective Police was simultaneously invoked by both parties.

Sir William Hughes was a rich north-country manufacturer, who had been knighted by the Prince Regent, and who, soon after that accession of dignity, took up his abode at Stone Hall, in the hunting county of Leicester. The old families fought shy, as might have been expected, of the "cotton-fellow," notwithstanding the costliness of his establishment. To overcome that repugnance, Sir William set up as a sportsman; purchased a rare pack of hounds, and spared no outlay or pains to afford sport to his aristocratic neighbours. His own appearance and exploits in the field seem to have been decidedly successful in that particular, and the end was, that having one day ventured upon the back of a high-spirited hunter, which cost him the trifle of two hundred guineas, he was pitched with great violence over the high-spirited animal's head upon his own. This was the last of his fields, and though, after lying for several weeks between life and death, he recovered his

physical health, his mind remained permanently affected; but not to such a degree as to convince a jury summoned under a writ of *de lunatico*, issued at the instance of his only son, that he, Sir William Hughes, was incapable of managing his own affairs.

Sir William had been long a widower, and this, his only surviving son, Edmund, had been sowing a seemingly interminable crop of "wild oats" in Paris, London, and other prolific soils, for about the same length of time; and not yet thirty, had already reaped the harvest of such husbandry—broken health, cankered weariness of spirit, and no end of debts. His attempt to obtain a judicial declaration of his father's insanity deeply offended Sir William, and it was many months before the afflicted gentleman could bear the briefest chance-sight of his son, without peril to his own life, from the excitement of angry rage.

Under such circumstances it was natural that Sir William, influenced, it might be, by a consciousness of deeper-seated mental infirmity than the commission *de lunatico* had been able to detect, should have been anxious to secure the kindly services and society of Mrs. Warner, a distant relative, then residing at a seaport in the West of England. This lady was a widow, her age the shady side of fifty, and her circumstances by no means over-prosperous. Of course, marriage was out of the question; and, after a brief negotiation, Mrs. Warner and Caroline Sherwood, her orphan niece, took up their abode at Stone Hall as housekeepers, nurses, and companions, to the aged, fast-failing knight.

This arrangement, which worked very well, was suddenly thrown out of gear by the death of Mrs. Warner, about four months only after her domiciliation in Leicestershire. Those four months had, however, enabled Caroline Sherwood to obtain a lasting hold upon Sir William's regard, who looked upon and always spoke of her as his adopted daughter; and she, nothing loth, remained to minister to the old gentleman's needs, and direct his household.

Caroline Sherwood, when that onerous task devolved upon her, was in her twenty-first year, and remarkable both for intelligence and personal attractions. Her character, I judged,

from the papers placed in my hands, and the long conference I held with her (she was the Mrs. Lister I was directed to meet at Osborne's Hotel), to have been, like most others, a mingled yarn of good and evil, of excellences and defects. One main defect, or I wronged her, was an inordinate craving after riches; or, more correctly, perhaps, the social distinction that usually accompanies wealth.

Notwithstanding that latent Plutonian passion, Caroline Sherwood had, some twelve months before she removed to Stone Hall, surrendered her heart and promised her hand to Mr. Charles Lister, second lieutenant of the "Blonde" frigate, whose only worldly wealth, actual and prospective, was his pay. The engagement had been strongly disapproved of by Mrs. Warner, and during her aunt's life the correspondence of the lovers had been carried on by clandestine means. After that lady's death Lieutenant Lister's letters were openly directed to Stone Hall, Sir William having by that time become incapable of exercising the slightest supervision over Miss Sherwood's doings. He had no wish to do so. As his shaken intellect dwindled into utter childishness, his regard increased for the handsome young woman, whose sweet voice and soft hand were so gentle and caressing; and he was perpetually promising himself aloud to make her his sole heiress, to the exclusion of his scoundrel son.

Now, Caroline Sherwood, as she herself told me in after days, did not for a moment suffer herself to be deluded into a belief that any will which Sir William could in his then state of mind make in her favour would be worth the paper or parchment it was written upon. It is right to state this, because it seems to show that her kindness to the sinking invalid was not prompted by selfish, unworthy motives. Very certain it is, however, that Miss Sherwood must have kept her opinion of Sir William's testamentary incapacity strictly to herself, and have been, moreover, especially careful not to give a hint to that effect to, or in the hearing of, the son and heir. An assurance of the kind would have been deemed invaluable by Mr. Edmund Hughes, who, though forbidden to present himself at Stone Hall, was kept pretty well *au courant* of his father's demonstrations and promises in favour of Miss Sherwood by the servants. These

greatly disquieted him, fully believing as he did that Sir William could make a valid will. The verdict of the jury establishing Sir William's competency to manage his own affairs appeared to him conclusive on that point.

Deeply impressed with that conviction, Mr. Edmund Hughes deemed it a grand stroke of policy to privately solicit Miss Sherwood in marriage. As her husband he would be safe, however matters turned out. She was a fine, clever girl too, and he almost felt and quite successfully feigned, a real passion for her. Ay, and the dazzled, facile fair one yielded to his suit, and became, by a strictly private marriage, Mrs. Edmund Hughes.

Whilst photographing, by such feeble light as I possess, the actual features, mental or moral, of real people whom I have chanced to meet in the highways and byways of work-a-day life, I quite agree, in a transcendental sense, with the creative writers who draw fancy portraits of heroic, angelic, superhuman beings. No question that Caroline Sherwood *ought* to have indignantly spurned the overtures of Mr. Edmund Hughes, and remained inflexibly faithful to Mr. Charles Lister. I am very far from disputing that; still it is but fair to consider for a moment the exact position in which the young lady found herself at that crisis and turning-point in her life. A kind of coolness had of late arisen between her and Lieutenant Lister—to what owing I was not informed, but I suppose to the cold shade inevitably cast by lordly proximate wealth between her and her lover. Then, the “Blonde” was about to be paid off. In those piping times of peace it was very doubtful whether the unfriended lieutenant would be again employed in active service, and his half-pay, to support a lady-wife and a possibly large family, would have been considerably less than two pounds per week. Such was the chilling prospect of her future which presented itself from one point of view. A glance in the opposite direction showed a husband, still a young man, of prepossessing exterior and address, whom she knew to be the undoubted heir of more than eight thousand per annum in real estate, of Stone Hall and park, and a heap of personals; and who, moreover, professed unbounded admiration of her own sweet self. Positively, I am not sure that I have ever known one young damsel who, constrained by the like circumstances, would have decided

differently from Caroline Sherwood. My acquaintance with the better sex is, however, a limited one.

The state of affairs which I have thus broadly sketched was not, of course, stated to me in so many words by Mrs. Lister ; but the essential facts it was necessary to inform me of : and these told the story so plainly, that " We were married privately at Leicester," seemed to be that story's quite natural sequel.

The marriage was scarcely a month old when a paralytic fit extinguished all of mental or physical vitality remaining to Sir William Hughes, and the fourth day from the attack he was a corpse. No will, valid or invalid, had been executed, and Edmund Hughes succeeded, by unquestionable right, to his father's large possessions. There had been no necessity, then, that he should hamper himself with a wife. He had been the merest idiot to do so ; and his folly was the more exasperating, inasmuch as the honey-month sufficed to convince him that he had felt no real, or at least no abiding, love for the pretty beggar whom he, in evil hour, had made the partner of his splendid fortunes. Mr. Hughes did not, to be sure, make any *speech* of this kind to his wife, but that he felt towards her in that kind, she, with woman's keen discernment in such matters, was certain as of her own existence, before Sir William had been borne to his grave.

Another week had scarcely passed, when her impression as to the cause of the contemptuous coldness exhibited by her husband in his constrained intercourse with, and the morbid irritation he displayed towards, her, underwent important modifications.

Mrs. Hughes entered the library one morning, not knowing her husband was there. He had just received his post-letters. Upon seeing her he manifested extreme confusion ; and as he crumpled up his letters and thrust them into his writing-desk, which he immediately locked, angrily demanded why she had sought him there. The astonished wife replied she did not know he was there ; then left the room.

What meant that sudden confusion—that crumpling up of letters, and hastily placing them under lock and key ? The letters Mrs. Hughes had noticed upon a table in the hall, and she, in looking to see if any were for her, had observed that two,



sealed with black, were directed in an elegant female hand—by *one* female hand, though the letters had arrived by the same post. A glance at the post-marks showed they had been forwarded on two successive days—a frequent occurrence in the cross-post deliveries at Stone Hall. Doubtless they were letters from some distant female relative: the first sent, a missive of condolence; the other a solicitation, possibly, of some kind of gift or favour. So concluded the young wife as she observed the letters. But that reasoning would not hold good after the scene in the library. Her newer surmise was that they were missives from a favourite mistress, dispatched with peremptory impatience to the new owner of Stone Hall.

A wife need not have an extravagant regard for her husband to be violently jealous of him. Indignant resentment of marital infidelity is as fiercely excited, I have noticed, by outraged self-love as by wounded affection. At all events, Mrs. Hughes, who never affected any violent passion for her husband, determined to satisfy herself, at any hazard, by any expedient, as to the mystery of those hurriedly-hidden letters. Mr. Hughes would soon take his morning ride; she knew where the key of his *escritoire* was kept; and should she, the key being concealed, have to break open the desk, she would, whatever the consequence, know who the woman correspondent of her husband was, and what were her pretensions.

The wife's purpose proved easy enough of fulfilment; her husband was gone: had left the key of his desk in the usual place. She held the letters in her hand, read them, and drank poison as she read. They were from Hughes's *wife*, not mistress; and in somewhat querulous tones insisted that he should, being now his own master, come at once to London for the purpose of conducting her and their child to Stone Hall. The second letter was to the same tune, with the addition that little Emily was in delicate health, which her speedy removal to the country, a physician had declared, could alone invigorate. Both letters were subscribed, "Your affectionate wife, Emily Hughes."

The strong will of Caroline Sherwood, as we must now again call the unhappy young woman, enabled her to go through the terrible letters, sentence by sentence, word by word, till their genuine, truthful character was firmly impressed upon her mind;

then hope and strength alike forsook her, and she fell down in a swoon with such helpless heaviness that the noise was heard by the servants below, by whose efforts she was restored to consciousness and despair. The letters were still tightly clutched in her grasp ; and the moment she had fully realised the position into which she had been entrapped by Hughes's villany, she resolved to invoke the vengeance of the law upon his guilty head.

She had not had time to leave Stone Hall when Hughes returned. A terrible scene ensued, which nevertheless ended in her sullen acquiescence in his advice to sleep upon the matter before committing herself to a step which, whatever the consequences as regarded himself—consequences which he was fully prepared to meet and defy—would irretrievably compromise her in the eyes of the world, and condemn her to a life of hopeless poverty and cankering discontent.

The substance of the man's specious harangue may be briefly given : He *had* married a young lady about two years previously, by whom he had one child, a girl ; but where—the all-important point in a legal point of view—that marriage was solemnised he would defy Miss Sherwood and all the lawyers in Leicestershire and London to discover. The first wife had married him for himself alone, *not because she knew him to be the undoubted heir of a vast property* ; and upon the slightest hint that he was in jeopardy for an act committed under the pressure of an overwhelming apprehension of beggary—from which one candid word of Miss Sherwood's would have relieved him—would at once vanish from the scene, if only for their child's sake. The letters Miss Sherwood had, no doubt, observed, were simply dated from London ; a wide place to seek a Mrs. Hughes in. All, in fact, that Miss Sherwood had really ascertained by her violation of his private correspondence was that she was certainly not his wife. Thus it would happen that, incapable of obtaining legal proof of the first marriage (the letters, even Miss Sherwood must know, were, as evidence, mere waste paper), she would be unable to successfully prosecute him ; still less, he was quite aware, could she, with her knowledge of the real facts, consent to live with him as his pretended wife. The upshot, then, of the very unpleasant affair must infallibly be, that Miss Sherwood would herself incur the pains and penalties of the

exposure, without being able to inflict the slightest injury upon him. He should, when the hubbub—which, after all, he cared very little for—had subsided, live in splendour abroad with his true wife, whilst Miss Sherwood would have been deprived of an honourable alliance or *settlement* by her own senseless outcry.

It must be admitted that there was a good deal of brazen ingenuity in the specious scoundrel's way of putting the case, and one cannot feel astonished that Miss Sherwood, distracted by terror and surprise, left him with the tacit understanding that she would pause before invoking the law to avenge the cruel wrong it had no power to redress.

Night, in contradiction to the proverb, brought no counsel to the frenzied young lady. Fiery indignation still spurred her on, pale-hearted fear still held her back from attempting to wreak vengeance upon the wrong-doer, when a post-letter, directed to Miss Sherwood, was brought to her. It was from her old and still devoted lover, Charles Lister. He wrote to appoint an immediate interview at Leicester, adding that a most unexpected legacy enabled him to offer her a comfortable home.

Miss Sherwood's resolution would appear to have been at once taken. She would see Lister, reveal to him all that had passed, and be guided implicitly by his advice. Whilst hastily preparing to depart, a note was brought to her from Mr. Hughes. It contained an offer, very guardedly expressed, of making Miss Sherwood a present of ten thousand pounds, which sum would, at any time after the lapse of a month, should no irritating occurrence intervene, be payable to her order. Mr. Hughes was himself waiting below, just within the door of the library, as Miss Sherwood swept by, no doubt with the hope of ascertaining if his large money-offer had mollified her rage, but she passed him without a word.

In her long explanatory interview with me, Mrs. Lister passed rapidly, and with a heightened colour, over her meeting with Lister. The memories it recalled were too painful. Besides, the papers confided to my discretion sufficiently supplied, she knew, every essential fact and inference relative thereto.

Lieutenant Lister, though much shocked and very savage at first, gradually calmed down; solemnly declared that his beloved Caroline, being entirely innocent in intent, of stainless moral purity as ever, he would still joyfully take her to wife. Miss Sherwood, after long hesitation, consented. It was mutually agreed to avoid in the future any mention of even Hughes's name; and shortly afterwards Charles Lister, bachelor, and Caroline Sherwood, spinster, were united in the holy bands of matrimony.

Whether Lister was disinterestedly sincere at the time of his marriage, it is impossible for me to affirm or deny. A strong suspicion is, however, cast upon the purity of his apparent Quixotism by the undoubted fact that Caroline Sherwood *did* at that first interview incidentally mention the offer of ten thousand pounds hush-money by Mr. Hughes; and that she was empowered to draw for that magnificent sum, after a short interval, at pleasure. Still it may be that the notion of making a market of Mr. Hughes did not occur to Lister till after the birth of a son, between seven and eight months after the marriage, by which time, through imprudent shipping speculations, he had fallen into pecuniary embarrassment. Certain it is that the Lieutenant and his wife lived most unhappily together after but a few months of wedded cohabitation; that he became intemperate in his habits, and personally brutal towards her. The hush-money which he compelled her to draw upon Hughes for was confiscated to further and uphold fresh speculations; and when, after a few years, that was compromised, he worked upon the bigamist's morbid dread of exposure to fleece him to a large extent. Lister had by some means obtained legal proof of the marriage between Emily Kerton and Edmund Hughes, armed with which weapon he left the nervous master of Stone Hall no rest or respite from extortion. He also, actuated by some hazy, but no doubt selfish, motive, insisted that young Edmund Hughes Lister—he was so named by the Lieutenant's own command—should accompany him on his latter predatory visits to Stone Hall. A prime result of that seeming caprice was that Mr. Hughes became strongly attached to the handsome boy, in reality, though not in law, as matters stood, his own son.

Whatever castles in the air the Lieutenant might have built upon the basis of those demonstrations of natural affection, he did not live to see the fruition or frustration of his views. He died at Gloucester, where he since his marriage had resided, a few months before Hughes was called to his account—of brain-fever, Mrs. Lister reported; the more exact designation would probably have been *delirium tremens*.

Thanks to Lister's persevering pulls at the purse of Edmund Hughes, Esquire, his affairs wound up much more prosperously than had been anticipated. Mrs. Lister found herself in the possession of a sufficient sum to purchase a comfortable life-annuity for herself, with remainder to her son, a safe, if obscure, haven from the bitter storms of life, in which she had barely escaped from utter wreck.

Edmund Hughes, Esq., of Stone Hall, did not long survive Charles Lister, ex-lieutenant of the "Blonde." Reckless spend-thrift of health, as of less precious blessings, he had wasted in the heyday of life the sources of a vigorous maturity, dying an old man at less than forty. The final warning came so suddenly that the lawyer, summoned in hot haste, and cautioned by the physician in attendance that not one moment should be lost, had only time to pen a will of some twenty lines, by which the dying man bequeathed to "my beloved wife" the whole of his real and personal estate; constituted her his sole executrix, and guardian of "my children," to whom he doubted not she would be both kind and just. Probate was decreed upon this will, and Mrs. Hughes became one of the richest widows in Leicestershire.

The word "children," inserted in the will at the testator's express dictation, referred, of course, to his daughter and Edmund Hughes Lister. As, however, the mother's natural right could not be superseded by the appointment of Mrs. Hughes to be his guardian, a friendly arrangement took place between the two widows, the substantial covenants of which were, that three hundred pounds per annum should be paid to Mrs. Lister for his maintenance and education, and that on the day he became of age the sum of five thousand pounds should be paid over to his use.

So far the affair, though sufficiently complicated, was intelli-

gible; but now came a phase therein at the interpretation of which I can only make the wildest guesses.

Mrs. Hughes, accompanied by her daughter, mother, and father-in-law, Captain Burt, a grim, Indian, sun-bronzed veteran, of some fifty years of age, paid Paris a visit about six months after the death of Mr. Hughes, and did not return to England—at all events, not to Stone Hall—till after an absence of eight weeks. A fortnight after their arrival Captain Burt went to Gloucester, and informed Mrs. Lister that his daughter-in-law, being anxious to more effectually carry out her husband's dying wishes with respect to the boy, Edmund Hughes Lister, so called, proposed that he should be forthwith domiciled at Stone Hall, and be there in all respects educated and regarded as befitting his recognised co-heirship with Emily Hughes to the large property bequeathed by his and her father to Mrs. Hughes, in trust—a moral, and therefore equally obligatory on her as a legal trust—for their future mutual benefit. Mrs. Lister, after taking time to consider the proposal, declined it; influenced, she told me, by a vague presentiment of peril to her boy, should she agree to what upon the face of it was an unaccountably munificent offer. Captain Burt, finding he could not shake her resolve, took leave with the outrageously absurd threat of an appeal to the Court of Chancery, with a view to transfer the custody of the boy to Mrs. Hughes, there being no equitable doubt of his true paternity.

The boy, at the time of Captain Burt's abortive visit to Mrs. Lister, was at school in a large establishment in the neighbourhood of Bristol. Ten days afterwards a well-dressed man called there with a note, purporting to have been written at the instance of Mrs. Lister, who, it was stated, was dying, and anxious that her son should be sent to her immediately in the care of the bearer of the note. No suspicion of foul play being entertained, the boy was forthwith dispatched in the charge of the stranger-gentleman, who travelled post. It was several weeks before the audacious abduction of the boy was discovered; precisely how I do not remember. The grief and distraction of the mother may be imagined. Her fixed conviction from the moment she could calmly reason upon the occurrence was, that her son had been carried off at the instigation of Mrs. Hughes,

in order to compel her, Mrs. Lister, at no distant day, to consent to the strange proposal of which Captain Burt had been the bearer. The Hughes family, on the other hand, indignantly asserted that Mrs. Lister herself had caused her son to be secretly spirited away, partly for the purpose of annoying Mrs. Hughes, but principally in order to extort from that lady a heavy sum, as payment for the privilege of carrying out the dying wishes of her deceased husband—a pious purpose which Mrs. Lister knew lay near her heart.

Meanwhile, anxious search was made for the missing boy by the Hughes family, with suspicious ostentation; advertisements offering large rewards for his recovery or tidings of him were inserted in the principal papers, but utterly without avail. The stranger-gentleman, who had given the name of Marsden, or Marston, to the principal of the Bristol school, seemed to have vanished with his prey from off the face of the earth after leaving Swindon, at which place the post-chaise had been hired.

I have now brought the narrative down to the time when I, in pursuance of the Commissioner's orders, waited upon Mrs. Hughes at the Clarendon, and on Mrs. Lister at Osborne's Hotel.

I shall dismiss these interviews very briefly. Mrs. Lister's sincerity of grief was painfully real. The accusation, therefore, of the Hughes family, that she was privy to the disappearance of her son, was, I could not for a moment doubt, an unmitigated calumny. The conversation with Mrs. Hughes and her relative, Captain Burt, left an impression on my mind that though the lady might not be personally implicated in the abduction of young Lister, there was some mystery or dread in connection with that occurrence which greatly agitated and alarmed her. "If," thought I, as I confronted the stern, cold, slightly-squinting stare, the curled, tightly compressed lips, and massive iron jaw of Captain Burt, "if I could imagine any sufficient motive *you* could have, prompting to such a deed as the carrying off young Lister, ay, or to the taking away of his life—it is you whose steps I should dog, your doings and associates for the last two or three months with respect to which I should make keenest inquisition. Still a hard, vulpine phiz, and a rusty nutmeg-grater voice, proved nothing, suggestive, under certain conditions, as they might be.

On coolly reviewing the affair on the following day, I could not for the life of me discover any means of *setting about* the task I was expected to successfully carry out. The only scrap of possibly valuable information afforded me was, that the fellow who carried off the boy "was a tall, well-set-up, military-looking man, with a prominent nose, hare-lip, and a white, bloodless face." That was something, to be sure; much, if one could fish out that he was an acquaintance of Captain Burt. It was in that direction I instinctively felt the only chance lay. "Well-set-up, military-looking man!" I would call at the Clarendon forthwith, and take stock of the grim Captain more minutely than on the previous evening. There could be no harm, if no good, in that.

The family had left, I found, for Leicestershire; whither, after much cogitation and a conference with the Commissioner, I determined to follow.

The post-village was, I knew, about three miles distant from Stone Hall, and upon arriving there, I, as good fortune would have it, obtained the use of a furnished bedroom at a general grocery shop, kept by a widow, who was also the post-mistress.

The family at Stone Hall, and notably Captain Burt, were not, I found, in good odour with the post-mistress or the village folk generally; and I found no difficulty in inducing the widow to permit me to inspect the addresses of the letters brought by a servant from Stone Hall, and the post-marks of those which were addressed to the inmates of that residence.

Three days had passed when a foreign-post letter arrived, addressed in an English hand to Captain Burt, the post-mark of which I with some difficulty made out to be Châteauroux, France, a considerable post-town south of Paris. I had not to wait long for the Captain's reply. It came the next day: "Lieut. James, Châteauroux, France: *Poste Restante*."

I reached Châteauroux before the letter, and having, of course, provided myself with proper credentials, placed myself at once in communication with a Commissaire de Police. The arrangement I suggested was that I myself should remain *perdu* within the post-office during the hours of delivery; and if a gentleman answering the description of the individual who carried off the boy from Bristol called for the letter, I could



sally forth, whilst the post-master held him in parley, seize and hand the culprit over to the French authorities. This, I was told, could not be allowed. All that the French police in such a case could permit was that Lieutenant James should be followed to his domicile, and if his explanation of the suspicions attaching to him were not deemed satisfactory, he would then be required to appear the next day before a magistrate, who would do what justice required.

"It is an affair between foreigners, and therefore quite exceptional," remarked the very civil and even more snuffy Commissaire, in reply, as it were, to a movement of irritation which I could not repress. "But *soyez tranquille*; our system of passports, so admirably organised, will enable us to lay our hands upon M. James at any time, should he for a moment slip through our fingers."

Well, Lieut. James, of the bloodless face, hare-lip, &c., rode up the very next day to the post-office, on horseback, asked for the letter, and, so clumsily was the whole affair managed, received it, and was again in the saddle before I could get into the street. I was so angry and excited, seeing he was about to ride off, that I stupidly cried out—in English too—to some gendarmes who happened to be coming towards us, "Stop him! Stop that scoundrel!" The officers stared, so did Lieut. James, and, instantly suspecting something of the truth, put spurs to his horse, and was out of sight in no time.

I must do my friend the French Commissary of Police the justice to admit, that he discovered that very day that a Lieutenant James had been residing for a considerable time at a farmer's house situate at about three leagues from Châteauroux; and that said Lieut. James, who had borrowed the farmer's mare the previous day, had returned at a break-neck pace, paid his bill, packed his portmanteau, and departed without delay, for Paris—the farmer-family supposed. Clever detectives we were, certainly! I was half mad with vexation.

To Paris in search of a man with a hare-lip, &c. A charming hunt that, which, though aided by the Paris police, I after four days and nights of exasperating and almost unremitting labour, finally abandoned.

And now I am about to state a circumstance, or rather to

relate an experience, the true explanation of which I am myself even now somewhat doubtful about.

I retired to my lodgings late in the afternoon, utterly knocked up in body, and soured, wearied in spirit. Of dinner I ate little, but of wine I consumed a bottle; at least I was charged with one. Whilst sipping it, my thoughts still ran upon the incidents, the complications, and vexations of the business in which I was engaged. Those thoughts slid, as it were, into dreams; a sleep, from which I awoke with a start, having surprised me. I retired to bed, still continuing to think and dream, the ideas or notions becoming gradually more distinct, intelligible, coherent. Finally, I awoke, and believed that I had dreamt that Edmund Hughes, during the many years he had resided at Paris, had married a French lady, who was still alive, and that, consequently, neither the lady calling herself Mrs. Hughes, nor Mrs. Lister, was the true widow of the deceased owner of Stone Hall. Captain Burt and his daughter-in-law must, during their last visit to Paris, have discovered the truth, and though I could not but admit the inference to be a very lame one indeed, had carried off young Lister in order to compel his mother to make common cause with them in resisting the claims of the rightful widow, and, in all likelihood, of the living heirs. I now believe that such an interpretation of the *imbroglio*, utterly absurd as it is in parts, must have suggested itself, in its chief feature, the previous French marriage, to my waking imagination, which had been so long striving to work out the confounding contradictions, improbabilities, possibilities, of the case, to an intelligible issue; and that my dream had but reproduced, distortedly, those waking guesses.

Nonsense or sense, folly or fact, I would at all events search the archives of the British Embassy, where alone I had understood such a marriage could have been legally solemnised. Leave to do so was granted, as a matter of course, upon payment of a heavy fee, and less than a quarter-of-an-hour's search was rewarded by the discovery of the record of the espousals of Edmund Hughes, son of Sir William Hughes, Knight, of Stone Hall, Leicestershire, England, with Julie Adrienne Delville, daughter of Hubert and Julie Delville, of Versailles, France. The date was nearly eighteen months previous to that of Edmund Hughes's

marriage with Emily Kerton, at St. Andrew's, Holborn, first discovered to have taken place there by Lieutenant Lister, and afterwards verified by Messrs. Jones and Son, of Bedford Row, who had at one time entertained strong doubts as to whether the alleged marriage with Emily Kerton might not have been a device on the part of Hughes to rid himself of a partner for whom he had conceived a strong aversion.

To ascertain if the French wife was dead, and when, I at once hurried off to Versailles. M. Delville, who was well known and highly respected there—I did not see his wife—frankly answered my questions. Their daughter, only child, and wife of that *scélérat* Hughes, had died, I found, without issue, very nearly six months *after* the marriage at St. Andrew's, Holborn, and eighteen months, consequently, or thereabout, *before* Edmund Hughes privately espoused Caroline Sherwood, who was, therefore, incontestably, the wife to whom, by the atrocious bigamist's will, all his estates, real and personal, had been devised. M. Delville added, that several months previously an English military gentleman had called, and asked similar questions to mine.

There could be no doubt now as to the motives which had prompted the carrying off of young Lister, otherwise Hughes. Should his father's will be set aside for ambiguity, he was the undoubted heir-at-law; and the audacious project had been concocted of wringing, at a fitting season, from the mother's love for her son, a compromise that would save Captain Burt, Emily Kerton, and her daughter, from beggary. The proposal, certain to be rejected, made to Mrs. Lister, at Gloucester, was, no doubt, a mere pretence, to be afterwards appealed to as a proof of Mrs. Hughes' tender regard for the boy, and the impossibility, therefore, that *she*, of all persons, could have entertained the idea of kidnapping him.

Their nefarious tricks would be utterly defeated now, I exulted to think, as I, with all possible speed, returned to England. A great error that, on my part. In less than two hours after I reached London I was closeted with Jones, senior, attorney-at-law. That benign gentleman listened to my account of the important discoveries I had made, and received the documents I had brought from France, with a condescending, patronising smile, and bushy eyebrows complacently raised in

compliment to "my really very creditable exertions in the case, which at the fitting time should, I might entirely depend, be handsomely recompensed." He then civilly showed me out of the office.

What afterwards occurred *in re* Hughes and Hughes I know nothing positively, except from, in some particulars, contradictory newspaper reports. Mrs. Lister was recognised to be the rightful Mrs. Hughes, and her son, who had been adroitly smuggled off to France, but well cared for there, was restored to her, upon conditions; namely, that one thousand—one report said two thousand—per annum should be secured to Emily Kerton, with succession to her daughter—which was, perhaps, just enough—and that Captain Burt's share in the abduction from the school near Bristol be quietly ignored. These were, I believe, the main points of the compromise arranged by Messrs. Jones and Son and Messrs. Smith and Smith.



## CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. WITHERTON.

I HAD been absent from duty on sick leave for some three or four weeks prior to the still unavenged murder of Eliza Grimwood—a tragic incident in the domestic history of London, which I have no doubt dwells freshly as ever in the minds of thousands. When the news reached me, I was, though convalescent, unfit for active duty; yet so powerfully did the barbarous deed, its sickening details, and the mystery which surrounded its perpetration, interest and excite me, that I determined to make inquiries forthwith at the scene of the murder. As I should act without particular instructions, my interference would be officious rather than official, but none the less for that would be considered commendable by the authorities if rewarded by success.

The distance from my dwelling was not more than a mile; but I had not proceeded half way when I found that my strength was feebler than my will, and I was compelled to rest myself in a tavern for a considerable time before I could recover sufficient strength to return home.

During my absence, which could scarcely have exceeded an hour and a half, a pressing message had been received from a Mrs. Witherton, of Queen Square, requesting to see me immediately. I was in no condition to personally obey the summons; and as no especial circumstance necessitating extreme haste was stated, I dispatched an answer to the effect that I could not wait upon her till the next day but one at the earliest, and if the affair was urgent she had better, therefore, apply at Scotland Yard for the services of another officer.

I had a slight professional acquaintance with this lady, knew more of her personal history than she was aware of, and was desirous of acquiring a still more intimate knowledge thereof.

It was, consequently, with regret that I felt myself compelled to refuse compliance with her message, and that regret was much increased upon being curtly told by the housekeeper, when I did call at Queen Square, that Mrs. Witherton had recovered from her nervous terrors, and required, for the present, neither the services of parsons or policemen.

"Mrs. Witherton has been ill, then?" I remarked.

"Yes, ill of blue devils—Methodist megrims—which of late will only yield to *spirituous* remedies. You know what I mean," replied the housekeeper tartly.

The petulant, unbecoming tone and manner of the housekeeper much surprised me. I had long known Mrs. Jameson, and that only about three months previously she had been rescued by the active kindness of Mrs. Witherton from a very painful position, in which, however, she had been placed by no fault of her own. I could not understand her, as, till now, she had always spoken of her mistress in the highest terms. It was plain that she was much excited and disturbed in mind. She had invited me into a front apartment, and no sooner had we entered it than she industriously set about dusting the dustless chairs with a feather brush, for no other purpose than to conceal from me, as much as possible, her pallid face, and red, tear-swollen eyes.

"It is very odd," said I, "that a young widow in capital circumstances should be subject to such nervous terrors."

"Oh, dear, no, not at all," rejoined Mrs. Jameson. "A young widow in capital circumstances is just the sort that the praying people get hold of first, and hold on to like grim death which they are always worrying and tormenting about. *You* know very well that Mrs. Witherton turned dreadfully serious before I entered her service, and now she's getting worse and worse every day; pokes about to all the churches and chapels in the neighbourhood, particularly when there's any uncommon horrors going on, such as funeral sermons and the like. Nothing," added Mrs. Jameson, "does her real good, when she's in one of her tragedy tantrums, but her child, and the spirituous stimulant I have spoken of, which she has lately taken to. The child makes her weep and sob herself to sleep; and brandy has the same effect in perhaps less time."

"Well, but your mistress could not have gone to hear a funeral sermon in the middle of the day before yesterday."

"Certainly not at a chapel," was the quick reply, "but at somewhere a great deal worse. You, of course, know," continued Mrs. Jameson, her sharp voice sinking and trembling with sympathetic awe; "you, of course, know all about the barbarous murder of that unfortunate barmaid. Well, what of all things must Mrs. Witherton take it into her head to do, after reading the paper till she looked like a ghost, than have a hack brought to the door, and order the coachman to drive her to where the body was to be seen. Yes, and she managed to see it, too; and didn't she go on when she came back about death, murder, and everlasting fire. She's a kind, sensible lady," added Mrs. Jameson, "when she's not driven mad by religious terrors, and I would not have said what I have only that you know much more of her than I do, or, perhaps, ever shall, and that it will go no further."

"Does a man of the name of Rookliffe sometimes visit Mrs. Witherton?"

"Yes, and generally stays about five minutes, which is all five minutes too long. For hours afterwards Mrs. Witherton's face is the colour of a candle, and she trembles in every limb as if smitten with ague."

"I heard," said the housekeeper in a low voice, after a few moments' silence, as if she had at last taken courage to speak out her secret thought—"I heard my cousin say, when I visited her about ten days ago, that—that Mr. Witherton—*her* husband—died—*suddenly*. Charlotte had been told so," continued Mrs. Jameson; "I am sure of that; but I said at once I could take my Bible-oath there was nothing in it, for a better-hearted woman does not live than Mrs. Witherton. It's nothing, *can* be nothing but religion—I am certain of it," added the housekeeper, and burst into tears.

"You would take your Bible-oath that there is nothing in what?"

"Why, of course," stammered the woman, flushing flame; "why, of—of course, nothing in Mr. Witherton having died a sudden, or even a violent, death."

"It is quite true that Mr. Witherton died a sudden and

violent death. The mode of death was that by which Eliza Grimwood perished, with the difference that Witherton died by his *own* hand."

"Blessed be to God for that!" exclaimed the housekeeper with a burst. "I don't mean that, you know," she added quickly—"merely that I am overjoyed to hear—to be made quite sure that—that—but I never really felt a doubt upon the matter. Had I done so this house should not have held me another hour for all the gold in London."

"The coroner and jury felt no doubt in the matter," said I. "Their unanimous verdict was *felo de se*, or suicide."

"Thank God! Thank God!" sobbed the woman. "Poor, dear lady! It's all plain to me. She has never recovered the shock; and I understand now about sudden death, murder, and fire eternal! She believes that her husband is gone to perdition, and refuses to be comforted! Oh, what an ungrateful wretch was I to speak as I did of the failings, the excusable failings, of the kindest mistress in the world! I am ashamed, thoroughly ashamed of myself. Yes, yes," went on the housekeeper, continuing to sob and pace to and fro with excitement, "yes, it is all plain, too plain now—even her frantic weeping at sight of her child. He reminds her of the father—of the *lost* father, as she believes. Poor, broken-hearted lady! And I, conceited fool! could dare suspect, since what I heard from Charlotte, that those were tears of guilt!"

I rose to go away, but was sharply stopped by the housekeeper with—

"One moment, if you please. What of that Mr. Rookliffe?"

"What of that Mr. Rookliffe?" I echoed, hardly determined what answer to make. "Well, of Rookliffe I have to say that if you can manage, the next time he visits here, to have him secretly dogged to his lair, I shall be obliged."

"I will take care that shall be done," said Mrs. Jameson, "but that which I meant to ask was why his brief visits should so distress Mrs. Witherton."

"I almost wish you had not asked the question, but as not to answer it would fill your mind with doubt and suspicion, which the facts, as known to me, could not warrant, and as it is, for several reasons, desirable that Mrs. Witherton should stand as



well as possible in your esteem, I will tell you all I know of Rookliffe's connection with Witherton's death. The unfortunate suicide had conceived a jealousy—a furious—but, as I firmly believe, a groundless jealousy of Rookliffe, which passionate distraction it was that armed the unhappy husband's hand against his own life!"

"A groundless jealousy!" exclaimed Mrs. Jameson. "You are sure a groundless jealousy?"

"I firmly believe that Witherton had no real, absolute cause of jealousy."

"No real, absolute cause for jealousy? Well, that is much; nay, it is everything. Still the appearance of evil was not, perhaps, avoided with sufficient care; and, in that case, I was not altogether wrong when imagining I detected the fires of remorse in those hot, burning tears. God mend us all!"

Mrs. Witherton's bell rang, and shaking hands with the warm-hearted, impulsive housekeeper, I left the house less, much less satisfied than she, that I had fathomed the true sources of the morbid restlessness of mind which was driving Mrs. Witherton to the degradation of drink—to the bottomless abyss of fanatical despair.

Why had Mrs. Witherton sent for *me* during the paroxysm of excitement which ensued upon her return from visiting the corpse of Eliza Grimwood—the corpse of one who had perished by the same manner of death as her husband, though not by her own act? Was it, could it be possible, that Charles Witherton's death was identical with that of the unfortunate girl not only in mode, but that the agency which effected it—*murder*, namely—was the same? The suspicion was a very horrible one—so horrible that I would fain have shaken it off, but could not. It fastened itself on my mind with swiftly-increasing tenacity as I mentally revolved anterior circumstances in the domestic life of the Withertons, and viewed them by the lurid light of the young widow's frenzied fanaticism, and apparently remorseful despair. A brief glance at those circumstances is here essential:—

Laura Woodward was a third or fourth rate actress and dancer at a respectable London theatre. Tastes differ, but I do not think many persons would have held her to be strictly handsome in face. Her figure was, however, perfect, her

manners engaging, and her ballad-singing charming by its expressive simplicity rather than by quality of voice.

This dangerous young person attended a grand Licensed Victualler's Soirée and Ball, whether professionally or not, in the first part of the evening, I do not know; but when dancing commenced she was amongst the general company, and soon attracted and fixed the admiration of Charles Witherton. This young man—he was about six-and-twenty years of age—had, about a twelvemonth before, succeeded, at his father's death, to a City tavern business, the net profits of which were said to reach several thousands per annum. Being an only child, he had also inherited the whole of the personals, which amounted, in cash, to a large sum.

Charles Witherton was, therefore, in respect of wealth, a capital catch for almost any middle-class girl; and how infinitely more so to Laura Woodward, whose net emoluments, taking the year through, did not, perhaps, exceed two pounds per week. No one, then, can blame her for putting forth all her charms and graces for the effectual enthrallment of so desirable a captive, and the result was that the susceptible young tavern-keeper found himself waltzed and whirled out of his heart and senses almost before he knew they were in any real danger.

In such a case we may be sure "the wooing was not long a doing," and I believe the wedding took place within a fortnight of the ball.

To show how thoroughly the bridegroom had been charmed out of all prudence and self-control, it is but necessary to state that, not urged thereto by even a hint on the part of the bride-expectant (she would, we may be sure, glide very, very gently across the thin ice which bridged over the gulf between poverty and wealth), he gave directions to prepare an ante-nuptial settlement which would secure to his wife, should she survive him, all he might die possessed of, with remainder to their children, should there be any, in equal proportions. This settlement was duly executed the day before the marriage.

The match proved to be a most unhappy one. Mrs. Witherton was about as much fit to be mistress of a tavern as captain of a frigate. A deficiency in that respect would not, however, have been regretted or regarded by her uxorious husband, had she

been contented to spend his money, dress splendidly, live in idleness and luxury, and care, or seem to care, for no one's admiration but his own. This last very reasonable condition Mrs. Witherton could not submit to. She was fond to excess of the admiration of men, and delighted to parade, as it were, the homage paid to her by simpering city coxcombs—to flaunt the flatteries of which she was the object, in her husband's eyes. This utterly reprehensible conduct enraged, at times maddened him; but I do not believe—in fact, I am quite sure, from strict investigation of all the circumstances of the case when the catastrophe occurred, that Mrs. Witherton had been positively unfaithful to her husband. Her married life seemed to have been a continuous flirtation, and nothing more, with every fop or fool that came in her way. In one instance only did it at all appear that she had felt the slightest regard for any one of those whose lip-homage she listened to and encouraged.

One Rookliffe—Robert Rookliffe—was the man upon whom Witherton's suspicions were finally fixed. Who or what this Rookliffe was nobody exactly knew, except that he dressed well, kept late hours, boasted of being intimately acquainted with sporting members of the aristocracy, and paid his bills with sufficient regularity at Witherton's tavern, where he had, before the landlord's marriage, taken up his permanent abode. He was not bad-looking, but one of the vulgarest, most blustering bullies I have ever met with. Mrs. Witherton was not of that opinion, and there was no question that she had been to a certain extent debauched in mind by the pretence and swagger of the fellow. Inadvertently or purposely, she had used expressions which, to Witherton's jaundiced apprehension, suggested a growing hope or expectation on her part that her husband's failing health—the fever of jealousy was in him, literally drying up the springs of life—would one day, and that not a very distant one, enable her to contract a second marriage much more to her taste than the first.

The irrevocable ante-nuptial settlement terribly exasperated Witherton's jealous fury; and he had again and again told a sympathising confidant that the marriage-revelries of his wife with Rookliffe, after his own death should have placed her in possession of abundant means of revelry, haunted his thoughts

by day, and his dreams by night, at times unseating reason by the violence of impotent rage.

I need dwell no longer upon this portion of the narrative. Over and over again Witherton had been heard to say he would destroy himself, and towards the tenth month of his wedded life the suicidal purpose was accomplished. It chanced that I was one of the first persons in the chamber of death when the terrible discovery was made.

This occurred at about eight o'clock on a dull, wintry morning. Witherton was a very early riser, and his non-appearance having at last excited surprise, when it was found that no answer could be obtained by the loudest knocking and bawling at his chamber door, it was burst open. A frightful spectacle presented itself. The miserable man had deliberately undressed himself, got into bed, and then cut his throat in a horribly effective manner. The pillow and sheet were saturated with blood, and on the counterpane lay a razor, the suicide's own, by which the dreadful deed had been accomplished. The body was cold and rigid, and there was no doubt had been dead several hours.

It struck me as something strange that the intending self-murderer should have taken the trouble to put off his clothes, fold them up, settle himself snugly in bed, and carefully extinguish the candle when about to immediately destroy himself. Further search afforded proof that he had intended to take poison, and must have changed his mind as to the mode of death at the last moment. On a chair close by the bed there stood a corked and sealed phial, filled with arsenious acid, labelled "POISON" in large letters. The name of Mr. Benson, the apothecary at whose shop it had been purchased, was also affixed. Upon application to Mr. Benson it was ascertained that the poison had been obtained late in the evening, two days previously, by Witherton himself, who had given the youth that served him his true name and address. The apothecary's apprentice correctly described Witherton's dress, and identified the corpse as that of the man he had served with arsenious acid, principally, he admitted, if not entirely, by the thick and rather peculiar sandy whiskers. A singular circumstance was that an unfinished note, in the deceased's handwriting, was found upon a dressing-table, addressed to the "Vile Traitress," his wife, in

which the writer exultingly intimated (they had not spoken to each other for many weeks) that he had at last hit upon a mode of defeating her and her paramour's infamous hopes by selling all off, and——

Here the note abruptly ended ; but a sufficient interpretation was supplied by evidence that Witherton had, during the previous week, spoken openly of an intention to dispose of all he possessed, and emigrate to America, or a yet more distant country. It was, moreover, proved that the unfortunate man had only the day previous to his death, called upon an agent in extensive practice for the sale of tavern properties, and given him instructions to advertise the sale of his (Witherton's) lease and general effects without delay.

Strange all that ; but the general evidence seemed to leave no doubt that Witherton's mind had been for some time completely unhinged ; that the purpose of one day was turned awry by the feverish caprice of the next ; finally, that the wretched man had destroyed himself during an access of frenzied jealousy. So, at least, the jury unhesitatingly decided, their verdict, as I have said, being *felo de se*.

I silently dissented from that verdict, though I should have found it very difficult, if not impossible, to give a valid reason for that dissent. There was a second door to the murdered man's bedroom, which was locked, and no key could be found. Ingress *might* have been noiselessly obtained through that door, whilst the reputed suicide slept, by any one that had possessed himself or *herself* of the key, which in such a case would, of course, be carefully concealed after re-locking the door from the outside. Still this was but a slight peg to hang so horrible a doubt upon, especially in the face of the apothecary's evidence, proving Witherton's unaltered determination to destroy himself, whilst affecting to be busy with preparations for emigrating.

The tragical death of her husband seemed to have completely prostrated Mrs. Witherton alike in mind and body. She was not, consequently, examined before the inquest, nor was Rookliffe, though his name, in connection with hers and that of the deceased, was frequently mentioned in the jury room. I myself minutely searched both his and her sleeping apartments,

but nothing to give colour to the dim and vague suspicion I entertained was found.

About three months after her husband's death Mrs. Wither-ton was confined with a son; and I was told that from that time a great moral change for the better was observed in her life and conversation. The tavern was disposed of, and she removed with her child to a quiet house in Queen Square. Rookliffe she had sedulously shunned since the first day of her widowhood, though it was conjectured, from words he had been heard to let drop, that she would find it difficult to ultimately shake him off. My informant's knowledge of the young widow's course of life was, however, not an intimate one; and when I had occasion to call upon Mrs. Jameson, a few weeks after her engagement in Queen Square, she could only speak in eulogistic terms of her benevolent mistress, and I forebore to press her, either then or subsequently, with unauthorised, and, indeed, unwarranted, queries.

The reader is now as well informed upon the Wither-ton-Rookliffe business as I myself was when I left Queen Square, after listening to the housekeeper's passionate, regretful out-burst and revelation.

Nothing more in connection therewith transpired for some little time, during which I was engaged in secretly watching the goings to and fro of a man, whom a shadowy suspicion rested upon that he was the assassin of Eliza Grimwood. He was an Englishman, though from his tremendous beard, whiskers, and moustaches, he was usually taken for a foreigner. He had a reputation, amongst those who knew him, of being an eccentric but devout man, and was, I found, a regular attendant at the Rev. Robert Montgomery's Chapel, Tottenham Court Road.

Just at that time intelligence was brought to England of the death of the Rev. James Hart, a young and gifted missionary, who had been murdered at one of the Sandwich Islands, under circumstances of peculiar atrocity. This Mr. Hart had long "sat at the feet" of the Rev. R. Montgomery, and having been well known to the major part of the chapel congregation, it was natural that his death should cause much painful excitement amongst them. Equally natural, too, it was that the popular preacher should endeavour to give a religious tone to that

excitement—to *improve* the young missionary's death, as the phrase goes.

It was accordingly given out that a funeral sermon would be preached on the next Sunday evening. I determined to be present, and in such a position as would enable me to closely scan the countenance of the man I was set to watch during the harrowing details of the murder, and terrific denunciations of the murderer, sure to be poured forth in an unpausing torrent by the reverend orator. If, I argued, if guilty creatures sitting at a play have, as it is said, been so wrought upon by the cunning of the scene as to straightway confess their misdeeds, surely the Rev. Montgomery's dramatic eloquence will call up some tell-tale sign, some outward manifestation of guilt, if guilty the man really be! At all events, I would try the experiment, if only for my own satisfaction.

The chapel was crowded, my man present, and I conveniently placed for observation. The sermon was unquestionably a telling one, and greatly affected the auditory. Keenly I watched the suspected man whilst the preacher detailed the circumstances attending the murder. The calm slumber of the victim, who, having recommended his soul to God, had lain down to rest in the smiling security of Faith and Innocence—the stealthy approach of the assassin, trembling at the sound of his own footfall, starting at his own shadow cast by the lamp clutched in his trembling hand—finally, the consummation of the bloody deed! All this, with much more, *told* amazingly; hundreds were in tears, ladies sobbed aloud, and *my* man wept as plentifully as any one—genuine tears, too, I was sure, of a generous sorrow, of compassion; and my suspicions touching him were at an end.

Next followed, with gathering vehemence, a picture or prophecy of the fearful retribution which would probably overtake the murderer in this world, and whose soul, if a miracle of mercy were not wrought to save him, the just and Omnipotent God would speed into eternal fire—

A scream so wild, so piercing, arose up at these words from the midst of the congregation, that the preacher's utterance was stilled as by a thunderbolt, and hundreds of the audience sprang to their feet in bewildered consternation. When one recovered

sufficient presence of mind to look in the direction the scream or yell had seemed to come from, it was seen that a lady, habited in deep mourning, was upon her feet, gesticulating wildly. Another glance, and I recognised that white, spectral face, those flaming eyes! It was Mrs. Witherton! Struck to the heart by the preacher's anathema, she had barely sufficient power to enunciate in one appalling scream the terror which convulsed her soul and body, and was then vainly striving to speak—foam, presently tinged with blood, bubbling from her lips with the mightiness of the effort. I pushed forward, but before I could reach her she had fallen down in a fit.

Hastily explaining that I knew the lady and her place of residence, I was assisted to carry her out of the chapel to the nearest chemist's shop for immediate restoratives. These having been administered with success, she was placed in a hack-carriage and conveyed to Queen Square, and as speedily as possible attended by a physician of eminence. He pronounced the patient to be in great danger—a lung blood-vessel had burst, and that absolute quiet was indispensable.

Before leaving that night I arranged with Mrs. Jameson to send for me without delay, should Mrs. Witherton, as I thought it likely might be the case, intimate a wish to see me; and to moreover send whether such a wish were expressed or not, before she died, if, as the physician seemed to fear, her death was near at hand. As I was going out the housekeeper, who was half distracted with fright and dismay, placed a paper in my hand; it was Rookliffe's address, which she had already managed to obtain. It was well to have it, though I could not for the present act against him.

On the fifth day after the scene in the chapel a note came, briefly stating that Mrs. Witherton, though against the physician's advice, insisted upon seeing me and a reverend gentleman whom she named, immediately.

When I reached Queen Square, the clergyman was already with Mrs. Witherton. She was calmer, more composed, and much less feeble than I had feared would be the case. A strong determination to relieve herself, at all hazards, of the hideous secret which was fast sinking her into the grave, no doubt helped to support her. The clergyman was also a magistrate,



and Mrs. Witherton's confession, or statement—she having first solemnly declared that she believed herself to be dying—was taken in form. At a sign from her mistress, Mrs. Jameson remained in the room the while—an unfortunate circumstance, as it proved. The material parts only of Mrs. Witherton's statement need be given in these pages, and this may be briefly done:—

“Mrs. Witherton admitted that she had thoughtlessly, and, as she had since felt, wickedly flirted with Rookliffe from an inordinate love of admiration and flattery, and received attentions from him which no modest wife should have permitted herself to receive. She, however, solemnly declared that her fault, or more properly, crime, went no farther than that. The death of her husband by his own hand—that hand guided and impelled by her own abominable conduct to one to whom she owed so much—flashed upon her as with the glare of hell-fire—I here quote her exact words—the grievous enormity of her offence, and burnt into her soul a consuming sense of blood-guiltiness. During the first months of her widowhood, Rookliffe, whom she had peremptorily refused to see, persecuted her with letters, most of which were successful demands for money. Wherefore successful she hardly knew, except that she must have, in some sort unconsciously, felt a vague dread of the violent temper of the man, and of evil consequences that might have ensued therefrom had he been provoked, coupled with a humbling consciousness that she had, to a certain extent, compromised herself with him. The birth of a son opened a new vista of life before her, and increased the growing aversion she felt for Rookliffe to intensity. As soon as might be she sold the tavern business, and came to reside in Queen Square, with the resolution of being a faithful steward of the father's wealth for his child, and for that child's sake no longer submit to Rookliffe's insolent extortion. Enraged by the stoppage of the supplies, Rookliffe began throwing out hints in his letters respecting “the adamant chain” which linked for good and evil her fate with his. A subsequent letter sneered at the miserable folly of her pretended belief that “a bond of blood could be dissolved by a capricious woman's silly tears.” Terrified by the shadowy, formless spectre presented to her morbid imagination, Mrs.

Witherton at length consented to see Rookliffe, he refusing to be more explicit in writing "for both their sakes."

Rookliffe came punctually at the appointed time, and, to the unutterable amazement and horror of the young widow, charged her with complicity with himself in the taking away of her husband's life. Nay, that she had first imagined the crime, and urged its commission; not, certainly, by direct words; nor did he himself admit in direct words that it was by his, Rookliffe's, hand that Witherton perished. The truth, however, was not for that the less a truth in both cases. "Did you not, madam," the callous scoundrel went on to say, "did you not confide to me the consternation you felt at hearing that Witherton was about to sell his property, and emigrate to the New World? Did you not say, 'I shall be beggared, ruined, if he be permitted to do that?' Did not your tone and look suggest that *we* should be foiled, ruined, if his purpose could not be frustrated? and did you not lament that, except as a consequence of his death, there was no chance of its frustration?"

"I was stricken dumb," sobbed Mrs. Witherton at this stage of her confession; "the hair of my head stood up, and it seemed that my flesh was turning to stone! Yet I could not but recognise a kind of distorted truth in much that he said."

"Did you not," continued Rookliffe, "did you not, soon after that conversation, ask me for the key of my bedroom, which you remarked *fitted the inner door of your husband's chamber*, which was locked, and the proper key mislaid or lost? The excuse framed by your tongue was that you wished to obtain possession of a particular letter that your husband had intercepted. Yes, but what did your eye, what did the mocking smile that played about your lips suggest? Nay, desperate as you knew my circumstances to be, command?"

The villain was silent—quite satisfied, no doubt, with the impression he had made. In some degree recovering her self-possession, and remembering the phial of arsenious acid found in the bedroom, Mrs. Witherton faintly asserted her belief "that Rookliffe was not, could not be, the diabolical assassin he pretended that he was, much less that she herself had——"

"Look here, woman!" interrupted Rookliffe, taking from his pocket a pair of bushy whiskers, and holding them on to his face.

"Do you think that with these appliances, aided by your husband's wardrobe, which the key gave me free access to, it was difficult to personate Witherton by the dim lamp-light of an obscure chemist's shop? The poison was not made use of—there were difficulties in the way: a razor, his own razor, settled the affair, making you mistress of the wealth, for the assurance of an equal share in which there is, I repeat, a bond of blood between us."

"I do not think," said Mrs. Witherton, "that I have ever been in my right mind since that terrible interview. I believed myself impelled to minister to his prodigal needs, and a profound despair fell like a black curtain between me and all hope of peace in this world—of salvation in that to come. You know the rest—the morbid fascination which murders, executions had over me; but you cannot know, no words could describe, the agony of an ever-present terror, which I vainly strove to combat by equally morbid fanatical exorcisms, and lately—so rapid has been my fall from self-respect—by the coarse stimulant of drink."

The document having been signed, Mrs. Witherton, whose factitious strength was ebbing rapidly, murmured, "Now, then, let justice be done on both of us," and fainted.

Criminal justice could have nothing to say to her, as the confession, exonerating herself from the alleged complicity in her husband's murder, could only be received as a whole. There was, however, enough in it to warrant the arrest of Rookliffe; and it was with extreme concern I heard that he had called whilst we were engaged upstairs, made inquiry as to what was going on, particularly as to who were with Mrs. Witherton, had received such answer as the garrulous housemaid could give, and hurried away.

He had been gone full half-an-hour, and when I reached his lodging the bird was flown. Vainly was indefatigable search made for him, and a large government reward offered for his apprehension. He was not to be found.

His doom was but postponed. Three years after his escape from England a communication was received from a judicial functionary at Brussels, enclosing a paper drawn up in the handwriting of an Englishman, who in Belgium had gone by the name of Thomason. He had, with another, been convicted

of burglary and murder in Brussels, sentenced to the guillotine, and executed. The evening before he suffered, "having previously given proofs of an edifying contrition," he drew up the said paper, which shortly stated that he had murdered Wither-ton, without the instigation or complicity of any one else, and that the widow, Mrs. Wither-ton, was wholly guiltless of the crime, not only in act, but intention.

Mrs. Wither-ton died several months before this, so far exculpatory document reached England. The fiery arrows of Remorse had done their work, and, spite of spiritual and material balm for hurt minds, she expired raving mad. The death of her little boy occurred about a fortnight before her own. This was the fatal poison-draught commended to her lips from the chalice of Retribution.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE ORPHANS.

ENTERING Worship Street from Shoreditch, nearly opposite the Eastern Counties Terminus, there is, or at least there was, five-and-twenty years ago, a yard or court about a hundred yards onwards on the left-hand side. I think it was called Bell and Dragon Court; but of this I am not quite sure. The place itself is distinctly visible to my mind's eye. On the right of the court, or yard, were stables; on the left three small cottages, having green shutters and green doors, and a tiny brass knocker to each door.

In the parlour-window of No. 1 was a neatly-written paper, fitted nicely to one of the panes, which announced that mangling was done there, also plain work. The same advertisement was, by the landlord's kindness, posted on the corner public-house, with this addition, "At Mrs. Mason's, No. 1, round the corner."

My acquaintance with the singularly interesting family dwelling at "No. 1, round the corner," commenced in quite an accidental way. I was returning by coach from Enfield, to which picturesque village I had paid a professional visit to no useful result, when, passing Shoreditch Church, I caught sight of the very man I "wanted." To stop the coach and spring off the roof was the work of less than a minute; yet, quick as I was, Jabez Martin was quicker, and before my feet touched the ground had doubled the distance between us, and was speeding away at a tremendous pace. I followed, shouting "Stop thief! Stop thief!" Several persons essayed to stop him, and though fiercely thrust aside (for he was a fellow of Herculean strength), their efforts greatly impeded his progress, and I was coming up with him hand over hand when he

ran full tilt against a girl as she turned out of Worship Street into Shoreditch, knocking her down with great violence. The force of the concussion staggered Jabez Martin, and before he could recover himself he was my prisoner. Two officers came up, and, handing over Martin to their custody, I attended to the girl. A woman had raised her from the pavement, and was holding her up by sheer strength. The girl was stunned, and there was blood upon her face. I bore her into a pastry-cook's shop hard by, and ran off for Richards—Michael Richards, the apothecary, then living about twenty doors away. We were soon back again, and I was rejoiced by his assurance that the girl had sustained no serious injury. The blood was from her nose, and whilst the simple restoratives necessary in such a case were being administered I had an opportunity of closely observing her. Her years could scarcely be more than seventeen, and a more *engaging* face I have seldom seen. Her figure, though slight, was elegance itself; and spite of a poor, washed-out cotton frock, coarse and patched shoes, and the rough abrasion caused by sedulous needlework upon the forefinger of her left hand, I felt when she opened her sweet, soft eyes, and a faint smile and blush changeably lit up her countenance, that a “gem of purest ray serene,” fresh from the divinest mint of nature, was before me. The soft, sweet eyes were, nevertheless, swollen with weeping, and an air of inexpressibly mournful sadness clouded the natural sunshine of her face.

Mr. Richards knew her, and asked in a kindly tone if her mother was better.

A burst of tears was the reply, followed by a timid explanation, to the effect that she was on her way to his house when knocked down. It was necessary he should see her mother without delay. She was worse—much worse.

Mr. Richards said he would go at once. The girl, Frances Mason, being sufficiently recovered to walk home, led the way; and I, at a gesture from the apothecary, whom I knew very well, followed. Richards, as we walked along, intimated, in his brief, curt way, that my police-officer experience might be needed by the Mason family.

A fire had broken out in their dwelling in the dead of night,

and in the endeavour to save her daughters Mrs. Mason had been so terribly burned, that not the slightest hope could be entertained of her recovery.

"A fellow lodged with the Masons," said Richards, "for whom at first sight I felt an instinctive dislike, an invincible repugnance. He is a working jeweller, and his name is Mark Lopes. I think it quite likely that you may have known him professionally."

"He is a Jew."

"An unmistakable one. Hook-nose, dark, gross eyes, flashy wai-tecoat, pinchbeck chains, pins, and rings complete. His age may be about thirty."

"I know a Jew by sight, and something more, of about that age, whose name is Lopes, or Lopez. He limps slightly, and has a scar on his left cheek."

"The very man! Hush! Here we are."

I followed Richards into the abode of desolation, soon to be that of death. The tenement had been gutted by the fire. Every article of furniture had been destroyed, and Mrs. Mason was dying upon a mattress, lent by the landlord of the Bell and Dragon public-house.

On the floor, by their mother's side, knelt her daughters, Frances and Rosamond, and close by them a minister of the Baptist persuasion. He was praying with closed eyes and upraised hands in a measured, monotonous tone, which strangely contrasted with the daughters' wild sobs and broken cries to God for help and mercy.

Unspeakable anxiety was expressed by the dying woman's face, which I was afterwards told had been one scarcely inferior in comeliness to her daughters'. Not anxiety for herself; for the sepulchral, tolling tones of the parson were not heeded by the mother, whose fluttering spirit was looking its last through swiftly darkening eyes upon her children, with an intensity of yearning solicitude, which only maternal love, stronger than the fear of death, could have inspired.

Her lips moved as she caught sight of Mr. Richards, and a feeble uplifting of her fingers, which were playing with the coverlet, was sufficient sign that she wished to speak with him. He stepped gently towards her, and bent down his head. The tones

were too feeble. He could not distinctly hear a word, and he said to me in a quick whisper,

"I am a little deaf. Will you, Mr. Waters, act for me?"

Of course I readily complied. The white lips moved again, and I heard the words, "Lopes—silver—watch."

This was all I could make out; and the meaning was obscure enough. Still, seeing that Mrs. Mason was going fast, I pressed her hand in token that she was comprehended. The response was a faint, pale smile, which as her gaze turned again upon her children, brightened into transient sunlight, fading swiftly into the cold, calm pallor of death.

I turned to leave, for my presence there, if not intrusive, could be of no service, and as I did so caught a glimpse of Mark Lopes, who, with the charred, partly-opened door in his hand, was gazing with unquiet eyes upon the scene within. A start of surprise showed that he had also recognised me, and the bushy-haired head and dingy-saffron face vanished in a twinkling. I was down stairs nearly as soon as he, and was up with him before he could open the street door. His perspiring hand I noticed slipped round, instead of turning the latch-knob.

"I wish to speak with you, Mr. Mark Lopes."

"With me—me! What about? What for?"

"Well, I want information about the origin of the fire here two nights ago; and as I know you have had much experience in fires, I shall be glad of any hint you may be able to give me upon the case."

"What do you mean by that?" exclaimed Lopes, with a sort of indecisive fierceness. "Do you dare insinuate that—that——"

"Dare insinuate what? Out with it, Mr. Mark Lopes. What is it that a man of your clear conscience could imagine I meant to *insinuate*?"

He did not answer, and turned savagely away. I was not, however, disposed to part with him; and as we were by then close to the Bell and Dragon, I said, in a half-civil, half-menacing tone,

"Come, come, Mr. Mark Lopes, I must and will know all about this fire. You were a lodger in the house, and, I have no doubt, up and doing as soon, if not sooner, than any other



inmate. We will just step in here, and over a friendly glass you will tell me all about it."

The fellow hesitated, but having mentally reckoned up the risks and advantages of telling his own story, or of peremptorily refusing to do so, accepted my invitation.

My knowledge of Mark Lopes, I must here premise, was but slight and incidental. He had carried on business in Bermondsey, and twice a fire broke out in his premises, consuming his amply-insured stock in trade. The first time he was paid the amount claimed without demur. On the second occasion a rigid investigation took place, which led to the apprehension of Mark Lopes upon a charge of arson. The evidence proved, technically, insufficient to establish his guilt, and he brought an action against the Sun Office, which resulted in a verdict for the defendants. I had since lost sight of him.

The particulars I contrived to elicit from Mark Lopes, relative to the Mason family and the catastrophe that had befallen them, were mainly these:—Mrs. Mason was before marriage a Miss Curzon, the daughter of a gentleman by birth and position, but of scanty means, who died insolvent. About a year after his death Frances Curzon married Mason, then a jeweller and silversmith in prosperous business at the West End of London. For about twelve years after the union Mason continued to prosper, or appeared to do so. Then disasters came upon him, and he ultimately broke down, not in business only, but in character; sank lower and lower in the gulf of poverty and sliming self-abasement, till he died in utterly desperate circumstances, and by his own hand.

Lopes had worked for him, and knew that his family—his sister especially, who had married extremely well herself—never forgave her brother for marrying "a pretty pauper." Whether Mrs. Mason, after her husband's death, had applied to her rich sister-in-law for help, he (Lopes) did not know—in fact, he did not know, or, if he had ever known, had forgotten that lady's name; but if she had applied, help was refused, and the widow and her daughters had no means left of independent life but the poorly-paid labour of their own hands. Mrs. Mason finally *hid* herself and children, so to speak, from those with whom she had associated in better days, in the cheap obscurity of Bell and

Dragon Court. The fire had broken out between one and two in the morning—how caused no one could make out. The two girls had been really in no danger, as they slept in the front room on the ground floor, and could easily, at the first alarm, have got out of the window into the court. In fact, they had done so when Mrs. Mason, who slept in the front room upstairs, awakened by the furious knocking at the street door, and the shouts of people in the court, rushed in frenzied terror down the flaming stairs in her night-dress to the rescue, as she supposed, of her children.

"The poor lady was delirious till she died," added Mark Lopes, "and talked terrible nonsense."

"You occupied the back room on the upper floor, and were, I suppose, in bed and asleep when the fire broke out?"

"No; I was kept awake by the toothache, and at the first alarm hurried on my clothes, rushed downstairs, and thundered at the girls' door. They quickly awoke, huddled on their things, opened the door, and I helped them through the window."

"Why not out by the street door?"

"Because the passage was in flames, and their thin dresses would have been ablaze in a moment. The fire burst out in the back room on the ground floor."

"The girls were in safety, then, when the mother reached their sleeping-room?"

"Yes; and I was just going to follow through the window when Mrs. Mason rushed in all a-fire."

"Is your own loss considerable?"

"No; not at all so. It has been low water with me for a long time. The Masons have lost all, as nothing was insured: not much in amount," added Lopes; "in fact, nothing to speak of—nothing of any value."

"I should suppose so: a family circumstanced as they were could have nothing of much value in their possession. Well, I am obliged to you, Mr. Lopes, for your information, scanty as it is."

This I said in a tone and manner intended to persuade him that any vague suspicion which his antecedents might have suggested had been dismissed from my mind; and I was pleased to observe that I succeeded in conveying that impression.

The Worship Street Police Office was not far off, and as, on leaving the public-house, I ordered an additional glass of brandy-and-water to be taken to the gentleman in the parlour, I was pretty confident that I should be able to set some one personally unknown to him upon his track before he left.

I was to a certain extent disappointed. The only men I would have trusted were known to Lopes, and I was fain to engage the services of a young man living in Chiswell Street, whose familiar cognomen was "Humpty Jim." He was the sharp-witted hunchback who at that period sometimes attended the weekly horse and second-hand carriage sales at the repository in Barbican. I should not, perhaps, have thought of, though I had twice before employed him, had I not, in traversing Finsbury Square, found him in hot dispute with a much bigger youngster than himself for the privileges and profits of a crossing there. Humpty Jim—his real name was James Cotterell—was evidently out of luck just then, and as the business in hand required to be conducted upon economical principles, it struck me that he was just my man, or boy, his age being not more, I should think, than nineteen at most. He jumped at my proposal—comprehended what was required with wonderful readiness. We got back to the Bell and Dragon before the last tumbler of grog had been imbibed by Lopes, and I went my way in the full conviction that I should be informed of all the Jew's doings, and many of his sayings too, up to such time as the sleuth hound I had placed upon the scent should be called off.

It may be asked what, except the unintelligible words gasped forth by the dying mother, could induce me to suspect Mr. Mark Lopes of felony in the case of the Mason family. Well, the motive for my conduct is to be found in the, at first view, inconsequent conversation between me and Lopes already given.

By that I knew that he was awake and busy when the fire at No. 1, Bell and Dragon Court broke out. That he did not attempt to rouse Mrs. Mason, who slept in the next room to his, but that he was zealous to aid the exit through the window of the daughters. That Mrs. Mason, "rushing all a-fire" into her children's chamber, found him there. *What had she found him doing there?* Then his eagerness to assure me that she had been delirious since the fire, had "talked terrible nonsense,"

and that there was nothing of *any value* in the house. All that, viewed in conjunction with his furtive looks and changing colour as we talked together, suggested to the practised ken of a detective-officer matter of grave suspicion. Moreover, the daughters interested me greatly. Rosamond, the younger, was not unlike one of my own girls.

Mr. Richards, the apothecary, a man of large and active benevolence, as hundreds still alive can testify, provided for the immediate physical needs of Frances and Rosamond Mason; and a true Sister of Mercy—one of that noble sisterhood, though not conventually disciplined and ruled, with whom London abounds, exerted herself to procure the orphans means of independent support. No. 1, Bell and Dragon Court was plainly furnished anew, and better-paid-for work was obtained for them. Time only could bring balm to their hurt minds.

I, meanwhile, was not idle in my vocation. Upon questioning the daughters, I found that their mother had a considerable quantity of valuables—heir-looms that had belonged to her father, which were kept in a stout box, locked up in a cupboard in the front ground-floor room, their sleeping apartment. The box had been consumed in the fire, and the contents, old silver plate and a massive gold watch, had, they supposed, been stolen during the confusion, as no trace of gold or silver could be found in the ashes and crumbled rubbish.

Amidst the greatest privations, their mother had refused to part with those mementoes of a happier life, except upon one occasion of sore need, when she pawned the watch for five pounds. Frances, the elder daughter, her mother being ill in bed, had been sent to redeem it on the day when the right to do so would have expired; but she could give no description of the watch, except that it was a large, heavy one. Upon application to the pawnbroker, that deficiency was supplied. Mr. Morris, of Norton Folgate, had entered the name of the maker in his books—that of Leah, a celebrated name—no doubt as a memorandum for his own guidance in the event of the watch being sold by auction, as the law, in such cases, requires. I had now a pretty distinct notion of what the dying lady meant by “Mark Lopes—silver—watch.”

Humpty Jim, supplied with funds by Richards, who was

vehemently anxious that Lopes should be hanged, clung to the Jew like his shadow. All in vain, however, for a long time, was that ceaseless vigilance. Lopes neither pawned nor sold silver plate or a gold watch, and was exceedingly kind and respectful to the Misses Mason; brought them work, and paid for it liberally.

He himself was getting into remarkably good case; wore fine clothes, frequented theatres and expensive taverns, without visible means for indulgence in such luxuries. Cotterell informed me that one morning Lopes received a letter, which he eagerly opened at the door, took a slip of paper from it, immediately stopped a cab which happened to be passing, and was driven off so rapidly that he, Cotterell, could not possibly keep the cab in sight. Cotterell suggested that the slip of paper must have been a cheque, which Lopes had hastened to get cashed. I thought so too; and when, after about a week's absence, I returned from Scotland, where I had been engaged in an affair that will form the subject of the next paper, the lad informed me that Lopes had received another letter, had shortly afterwards come out of the house in which he lodged, called a cab, and ordered the driver to take him to Hoare and Co.'s, Fleet Street.

I called at Hoare's, and was informed that a banker's order for one hundred pounds, being the second for that amount drawn in favour of Mark Lopes, Esquire, by a Bath banking-house, had been paid two days previously to the person that presented and endorsed it. At my request the manager said he would write to Bath, and ask the name of the person that had obtained the order from the bank. The answer received was, "Mrs. Barfield, a lady of fortune, residing in the vicinity of Bath, who keeps an account with us."

Who was Mrs. Barfield, and how the deuce came it that a lady of fortune should send drafts for two hundred pounds to Mark Lopes? It utterly confounded me, till Mr. Richards suggested that Mrs. Barfield *might* be the wonderfully well-married sister-in-law of Mrs. Mason, whose name or residence Lopes professed to be ignorant of, but with whom, nevertheless, he had perhaps contrived to open a correspondence, pretendedly on behalf of the bereaved desolate orphans.

This was a shrewd guess, at all events, and Mr. Richards undertook to write by that evening's post to Mrs. Barfield.

I had left Mr. Richard's shop, when it occurred to me that there was a very easy way of ascertaining whether Mrs. Barfield was the Misses Mason's aunt, by simply asking that question of the young ladies themselves. I accordingly turned up Worship Street, and into Bell and Dragon Court, but was stopped before I reached No. 1, by young Cotterell.

"Lopes is in there," said the hunchback, who was much excited. "Lopes is in there with Miss Frances. Miss Rosamond has been sent out with work."

"Well, what of that?"

"I don't know exactly what of that," replied Cotterell, fiercely; "but if I heard the least slightest scream in the world I *would* know. D—n his heart!" continued the lad, opening and closing his fist in a manner unconsciously, and as if preparing to clutch and grapple with some hated thing. "D—n his heart! I guess what he's after; I ain't a fool. This is the fourth time he has been here and sent Miss Rosamond away upon some pretence or other; but I'd be down upon him like a breeze. I could throttle him," added Cotterell, with a savage snap of his teeth, "I could throttle him as easy as I could a sparrow, and I would too!"

I was amazed at the lad's vehemence; at the bitter rage revealed by his burning eyes, and pale, death-pale face. A few questions sufficed to discover the source of his emotion. He had taken messages to the sisters from Mr. Richards, been kindly noticed by them, and had become affected, or infected, by the beauty and sweetness of the elder to an extraordinary degree—a feeling not the less real and poignant for being ridiculously absurd. And I could not help thinking, as I looked upon his sinewy though stunted form, his stout arms and hardened hands, that he might prove at need a better champion of Miss Francis than many a six-foot grenadier.

"Go in," he went on to say; "go in quietly yourself at once. He has been there more than half an hour. Here," added the hunchback with some hesitation, "here is a latch-key which fits the door."

"I could not rest," said the excited lad, in reply to my stare

of surprise, "I could not rest till I had it. How without could I get in if I wanted to?"

I availed myself of the key, entered the house quietly, and listened to the conversation going on in the back room between Lopes and Frances Mason. Conversation it could hardly be called, her share therein being confined to ejaculations of surprise and alarm in reply to the Jew's ardent solicitation that she would become his wife. The fellow was positively proposing marriage to the distressed and astonished girl, though her mother was scarcely cold in her grave! I soon, moreover, comprehended that remembrance of the kindnesses which he had thrust upon the sisters greatly mitigated the manifestation of terror and disgust which the proposition excited. Completely mistaking the cause of the maiden's tremulous civility, Lopes waxed bolder, and seemed about to offer her some personal indignity, when I suddenly entered the room. He seemed to literally collapse with surprise and consternation, whilst a slight scream of joy, followed by a burst of hysterical tears, interpreted the feeling with which Frances Mason greeted my appearance.

I thought it unwise to let it appear that I had been listening outside, and after a few words of apology for my unannounced intrusion, I said abruptly, having first so placed myself that I could see Lopes' face in the tiny chimney-glass,

"Is a Mrs. Barfield, who lives near Bath, an aunt of yours, Miss Mason?"

The question was an electric shock to Lopes, and his livid face turned rapidly from me to Frances Mason, from her to me, his wild, flaming glance betokening, as he did so, intensest alarm and astonishment.

"I have never heard of a Mrs. Barfield," said Frances Mason. "Our aunt's name is Dalton, and she lives at Brighton."

"The Mrs. Barfield I am speaking of," said I, turning sharply upon Lopes, "is the lady who has lately sent you two drafts, amounting to two hundred pounds, upon Hoare's, the bankers."

The fellow blanched visibly, but Frances Mason's reply to my question had so far restored his self-possession that he surlily retorted with—

"What the devil right have you to ask who sends me cheques?"

"Well, no precise right at present. But come, let us begone. This young lady does not, it is quite evident, like our company, and I have a word or two for your private ear."

Lopes sullenly acquiesced, and we left the house together. Cotterell was in the court, seemingly intent upon the grooming of a horse. Lopes did not notice him; but a sly, swift, round-the-corner squint shot at me showed that Cotterell did us, and that his eyes were quite sufficiently wide open to see the latch-key, which I managed to drop unobserved by Mr. Lopes.

I invited the Jew to take a glass at the Bell and Dragon; he complied, but was so sullenly incommunicative that I soon left him. It was then about four o'clock, and the winter evening was already closing in.

Five hours afterwards, just upon the stroke of nine, and whilst I was at supper, a note was brought me by an officer attached to the Worship Street Police Office. I copy it verbatim:—

"SIR,—I ave kild the Jew; lest wais I hope so. Picked him clene over stares. Upon is cussed hed. All rite with Miss Francis. Jist in time. Hoping to see you and quite hapy, JAMES COTTERELL."

The officer's report, supplemented by subsequent inquiry, gave the following particulars of what had occurred since I left Bell and Dragon Court:—

Mark Lopes, warned by the discovery of his correspondence with Mrs. Barfield, determined, at any hazard, to make Frances Mason glad to become his wife. With that view, he at about half-past six in the evening returned to No. 1, Bell and Dragon Court, and sent Rosamond Mason away under pretence that a lady in Gracechurch Street for whom they worked wished to see her immediately. Frances was in the back room upstairs, and did not know that her sister had left the house, or that Lopes had returned till he presented himself before her. A vehement altercation ensued, and finally Lopes, drunk with excitement and liquor, had seized the terrified, helpless girl, and partially stifled her frenzied screams, when Cotterell burst into the room.

"The strength of twenty men was in me," said the hunchback,



with proud, glistening eyes. "The strength of twenty was in me. I seized the scoundrel by the throat, dragged, whirled him out of the room, and pitched him as easy as a skittle-ball over the staircase. I glory in it. Miss Frances is an angel still, and I don't care what comes of me."

Mark Lopes, though frightfully injured, recovered after about six weeks' medical discipline in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and was then transferred to Newgate. The next session he was indicted for stealing from No. 1, Bell and Dragon Court, a quantity of silver plate and a gold watch. Also with obtaining, nominally from Mrs. Barfield, but really from Mrs. Dalton, who was ill at the time, and staying at the former lady's house, two hundred pounds, under the pretext that he was the legal guardian of Mrs. Dalton's nieces, and that he was anxious, in fulfilment of their mother's last wishes, to discharge various debts that had been incurred during her long illness, as well as to befittingly equip the Misses Mason for appearing at their aunt's mansion at Brighton. He was convicted upon both charges, and sentenced to fourteen years' transportation.

Frances and Rosamond Mason were adopted by their wealthy, childless aunt; and both, I have heard, have married happily.

Mr. Richards, with Mrs. Dalton's money, purchased a capital greengrocery business for James Cotterell; but he had no heart to it, and withering gradually away, died, poor fellow, within six months of the day when he furtively watched, from round the corner of an adjacent street, the departure of Frances Mason from London.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## HELEN FORSYTH.

I HAVE mentioned in "The Orphans" that I was at the same time engaged in an affair which required my presence in Scotland. The case was a remarkable one.

James Fergusson, a romantic, dreamy youth, born and bred at Clyde Cottage, about five miles distant from the city of Glasgow, and sole heir to about four hundred pounds per annum, chiefly in house property, chose, at the ripe age of twenty, or thereabout, to fall, or fancy himself, in love with one Helen Forsyth, a gay damsel whom he met at a funeral, of all occasions in the world for the bringing about of such a catastrophe. The girl was pretty, and considerably younger than he, her age in years being three less. In knowledge of the world she was at least ten years his senior.

Her mother was an adept in the baser department of that science; the daughter her apt pupil. This Mrs. Forsyth, who, though she could scarcely be less than five or six and thirty, had a very youthful appearance, was an equivocal widow, engaged in a poorly-paying mantua-making business, in a by-street in Glasgow. It was shrewdly doubted that she had a legal title to the name of Forsyth, or that her dainty daughter was born in wedlock.

The purport of the counsel which, under such circumstances, such a mother gave Helen Forsyth upon the latter's return from the funeral, may, with the help of after discoveries, be easily imagined:—

"James Fergusson's shy advances were not only to be encouraged, they should be stimulated by all the arts familiar to pretty, provocative damsel-kind. His bedridden father could not

last many weeks, people said, and then he would possess in his own right full four hundred a year, and was, moreover, reputed to be a soft, simple youth, whom a clever wife might rule with absolute sway. Such a chance it would be just downright madness to miss. No silly scruples about being engaged to Adam Ritchie should be allowed to mar, or for a moment endanger it. Ritchie, who, as second mate of a merchant vessel, was but one remove above a common sailor, might never rise higher, nor, indeed, return to Glasgow again from the West Indies, where he was when last heard of; and if he did, and was prospering, he would very likely, sailors being proverbially as fickle as the winds and waves themselves—have no mind to carry out his light, merely verbal promise to some day marry a penniless, however pretty, mantua-maker."

Thus urged, Helen Forsyth agreed to act upon her mother's advice, though reluctantly, as she was strongly attached to Adam Ritchie, who was a smart, handsome sailor, very much superior in personal advantages to her new admirer

There is no doubt, moreover, that the daughter's hesitation was the more readily overcome by a vile suggestion of Mrs. Forsyth's, that should she be Mrs. Fergusson when Ritchie returned, she would not be thereby absolutely precluded from occasionally seeing her old sweetheart. He was personally unknown to Fergusson, who could never have heard, never would hear, that there had been a former intimacy between him and Helen Forsyth.

Having once determined upon her course, the girl-woman pursued it with avidity, and such swift success, that she became the wife of James Fergusson within a month of the day upon which she first made his acquaintance. The marriage was kept secret, and the bride remained at her mother's till old Mr. Fergusson's death, not long afterwards, when she at once removed to Clyde Cottage. The mantua-making business was gladly given up, and Mrs. Forsyth took up her permanent abode with the young couple, upon the invitation of her son-in-law to make his home hers as long as she lived.

A short time sufficed to enable the wilful wife to bring her youth-husband into subjection, not to herself only, but Mrs. Forsyth. Yet not so completely but that at times, and under

extreme provocation, flashes of a latent spirit were evoked, which showed there was danger in him. Especially to excite his jealousy would, they were before long made to understand, be extremely dangerous. Fergusson loved his wife, wilful vixen though she was, with deep affection; and once, upon only fancying he detected a *look* of secret intelligence pass between her and a youthful neighbour who sometimes looked in at Clyde Cottage, he flew into a transport of rage, inflicted personal chastisement upon the confounded young man, and so terrified his wife and mother-in-law that they ran screaming away, and locked themselves up in a bedroom till his frantic rage had subsided. Legal process was issued against Fergusson for the assault; it was shown that there was not the slightest ground for the suspicion that had prompted the outrage; and Fergusson was not only obliged to apologise for his conduct, but to disburse a considerable sum for law charges. This incident was afterwards remembered to his prejudice.

Nothing further requiring notice transpired, with reference to the inner life at Clyde Cottage, till about a year after the marriage. The domestic supremacy of the wife was, in the main, sustained, and in one essential particular she was absolute. The money department she kept strictly in her own hands, and there happened to be in the house cash to over fifteen hundred pounds, savings from his income by the deceased Mr. Fergusson. It had been withdrawn at a moment of panic from a Glasgow bank, and was not afterwards replaced, Mr. Fergusson having determined to invest it in house property, but no eligible opportunity happened to present itself during his life. Since then several good investments had offered themselves; but Mrs. Fergusson refused, under one pretence and another, to let the money go out of her own actual possession, and steadily added to it such sums as could be spared from her husband's income. It was a foolish, costly whim, her husband urged, to keep such a sum of money lying idle. It was not, however, a matter to rouse his ire, and his wife persisted in her "foolish, costly whim" till towards the end of her first year of married life, when she became suddenly convinced of its folly.

Mrs. Fergusson admitted she had been wrong, quite wrong: the money ought to be invested in houses—Glasgow houses that

could pay good interest; and she and her mother diligently searched the advertising columns of the weekly paper in search of likely-looking announcements that such properties were for sale. They were always successful in finding one or more that looked likely, and the same or next day they were off together to view the houses for themselves. Fergusson, who had immense confidence in the business shrewdness of his mother-in-law, and was, besides, absorbed by his garden, upon which he prided himself almost as much as he did upon his pretty wife, never cared to accompany them. It was sufficient that he would have a say in the matter after they had passed a favourable judgment.

They never did pass a favourable judgment, and after visiting Glasgow once or twice a week, for two or three months together, they were still far off of attaining the object sought after.

Meanwhile, absorbed as Fergusson was in his amateur-gardening pursuits, he could not but become with every passing day more and more impressed by the growing change, not only in his wife's demeanour towards himself, but in her personal appearance. Her speech lost much of its tartness, and sometimes a kind of regretful regard, of bitter self-reproach, seemed, when addressing him, to be expressed in her tone and manner. It struck him, too, that she was handsomer than ever; that her eye and cheek sparkled with brighter fire, a fresher bloom. All this, added to the feverish excitement of her general manner, hysterical bursts of weeping without conceivable cause, especially if he spoke to her with more than his usual tenderness, presented her with a rare flower fresh culled from his garden, or in any other way manifested the strong constancy of his affection, greatly disquieted him. Those manifestations, Fergusson also noticed, greatly annoyed and irritated Mrs. Forsyth, whose scowling brow and snappish sneer had a marvellous effect in restoring Mrs. Fergusson's self-control. The young wife seemed to shrink into herself, as it were, before her mother's imperious rebuke, and, from abject fear of her, to forcibly suppress emotions to which she had rashly given vent.

Fergusson did not for a moment suspect that those were symptoms of a mind excited by guilty passion and poignant remorse—signs of a fitful, vain—felt to be vain—repentance of an irredeemable wrong done to a loving, true, and trustful hus-

band. So far was Mr. Fergusson from so suspecting, that he waited upon a celebrated Glasgow physician, and requested him to call without delay at Clyde Cottage, as he feared that fever or other analogous disease was lurking in the veins of his wife, which required to be promptly checked. The physician went to Clyde Cottage and saw Mrs. Fergusson, but did not prescribe for her. Her malady was moral, not physical, he told her husband, and in such cases a high authority had long since declared that patients must minister to themselves.

The mystery was soon made plain. Mrs. Forsyth frequently received letters from Glasgow, and one afternoon, when she and Mrs. Fergusson were upstairs making ready to set out for that city, to view, as usual, some desirable house property advertised for sale, a note was brought by an elderly woman, who would insist upon giving it with her own hands to Mrs. Forsyth or Mrs. Fergusson—it did not matter which—but to one of them, or nobody else. Fergusson happened to hear the dispute, and actuated by a vague feeling of curiosity and suspicion, stepped to the door, ordered the servant to return quietly to the kitchen, and then desired the letter-bearer to follow him to the presence of Mrs. Forsyth. The confounded woman mechanically obeyed, and presently found herself locked into a room and alone with Mr. Fergusson.

“You must give *me* the letter which you were charged to deliver to Mrs. Forsyth *or* my wife,” said he, sternly.

The messenger, though much frightened, declared she would not. The offer of a sovereign failed to induce compliance, but a threat of taking her before a magistrate had a more potent influence, and she finally surrendered the letter under protest.

Fergusson tore it open, ran over the lines with a glance of fire, “staggered as if death-struck,” recovered himself by a strong effort, and left the room, locking the door after him upon the dismayed letter-bringer, and was seen no more by her.

The note was a brief one :—

“DEAREST HELEN,—I send to you in haste, but by a safe hand, to say that for sundry reasons we must be off this very night, instead of three days hence, as we had agreed. Be sure, therefore, to bring all the money with you *this afternoon*. Never mind about clothes. I shall be waiting at the old place by four o’clock at latest. Be punctual, and believe me to be

“Your faithful lover till death, ADAM RITCHIE.”

The note was certainly addressed to Mrs. Forsyth, and her baptismal name was the same as her daughter's (Helen); but there could be no doubt that the address was a blind to cover a criminal correspondence with Mrs. Fergusson. This was the husband's conviction, and he awaited in a state of mind bordering upon frenzy the going forth of his wife and mother-in-law upon their pretended errand.

He had not long to wait; they left the house together, intending to walk to Glasgow, and ride back in the evening by a public conveyance, which passed within a quarter of a mile of Clyde Cottage. As soon as they had gone a sufficient distance Fergusson stealthily followed, unperceived by them, though if they had but once looked back, they could hardly have missed seeing him. His desperate purpose was to surprise his faithless wife and her paramour together, slay him on the spot, and possibly her also. Suddenly it occurred to him, after reaching Glasgow, that he had provided himself with no weapon for the execution of his murderous intent; and to enter a shop for the purchase of one would be to lose sight, in the crowded streets, of Mrs. Forsyth and his wife, who were walking very fast. Had he nothing about him that would serve his purpose? Yes; his pruning-knife — a deadly, sharp-pointed weapon, which he clutched with exultant ferocity! Passion-tossed as he was, Fergusson had sufficient command over himself to avoid exhibiting to passers-by any external indication of the mighty rage within. He met four persons who knew him well, but not one of whom remarked anything unusual in his aspect and manner. Of course he passed them very quickly.

Mrs. Forsyth and her daughter turned into an obscure, narrow street, and when about half through stopped at a mean-looking house, opened the street door with a pass-key, and, still without looking round, disappeared within. Fergusson was up in a few strides, burst in the frail door, which had no outside lifting-latch, with one stroke of his foot, and was instantly in the presence of a tall, youngish man dressed as a sailor, Mrs. Fergusson, and her mother.

They were standing just within a near side room, the door of which was wide open. The sailor was warmly shaking both of Mrs. Fergusson's hands in his, she and her mother having their

backs towards the passage. Almost before the clasping hands could be snatched asunder, Fergusson leaped at the sailor with a scream of rage, striking wildly at him with the knife. Adam Ritchie, though taken at such a disadvantage, made a fierce fight of it, and after a desperate struggle, in which he received several wounds, wrested the knife from his assailant, and in return stabbed him with it in the chest. By that time the screams of the women had brought in several passers-by, who forthwith secured the two combatants, both of whom were exhausted and fainting from exertion and loss of blood.

During the next fortnight Fergusson lay in a dangerous state, not only from the effect of the wounds he had received, but brain fever. His final recovery was slow and fluctuating, and many weeks passed before he was in a sufficiently sound state of mind and body to bear any direct allusion to the circumstances which had destroyed his happiness and well-nigh his life. Nevertheless, all that officious and unsilenceable memory did not recall might have been told in a few words.

Adam Ritchie, though he had lost a good deal of blood, was confined to his bed for about twenty-four hours only, and when called upon to explain the cause or causes which had led to the sanguinary affray, so shaped his statement that it was impossible to make out who had been the immediate aggressor—he or the jealous husband. The women, too, no doubt by preconcerted agreement with Ritchie, gave equally confused versions of the fight, so that all which clearly appeared was that a sudden and ferocious encounter had taken place between the two men, caused by an utterly unfounded access of jealousy on the part of Fergusson. All three asserted that Ritchie had, in fact, been courting Mrs. Forsyth—not Fergusson's wife. The note which had been found in Fergusson's pocket was produced and read, but, as the reader will have noticed, was perfectly reconcilable with this assertion of the witnesses. There was nothing grossly improbable in the averment that a man of Ritchie's age, about twenty-six years, should have courted a comely woman, who, judged by her looks, was not a year older than he. To questions as to why he did not visit openly at Clyde Cottage, and marry Mrs. Forsyth in the face of day, instead of proposing to run off with her at night, he replied that



they had no intention of marrying, for the simple reason that Mr. Forsyth, who had been very many years separated from his wife, was believed to be still alive. They proposed living together as man and wife, but not to contract a legal union till there was no chance of a prosecution for bigamy being instituted against Mrs. Forsyth. Mrs. Fergusson had been naturally anxious that the proposed arrangement should be carried out in a manner that would least compromise herself and husband, as consenting parties to a connection repugnant to the moral sense of society and the law of God. The money she was requested to bring with her was Mrs. Forsyth's own, not Mr. Fergusson's, and so on. The former violent assault by Mr. Fergusson upon a neighbour, at the suggestion of an utterly groundless jealousy, was, moreover, referred to as a sort of moral confirmation of Ritchie's guiltlessness of offence towards the jealous, excitable husband.

Such an explanation, specious as at the first blush it might appear, would upon the slightest real investigation have broken down; yet, as Ritchie disappeared from Glasgow as soon as he possibly could, accompanied, too, by Mrs. Forsyth, no doubt with the hope of confirming the concocted story in her daughter's behalf ("the money" not having been obtained), and as no one had been killed, permanently hurt, or robbed, the affair, notwithstanding Glasgow boasted a public prosecutor, was allowed to drop.

Mrs. Fergusson had returned to Clyde Cottage, and was extremely desirous of attending upon her husband during his illness. The bare sight, however, of his wife so excited the sufferer, that the medical gentleman in attendance peremptorily forbade her to even enter the sick chamber. She remained in the house notwithstanding, and when Fergusson recovered was still there, but no longer ventured to leave her bedroom. Thoroughly shame-stricken since discovering that she was several months gone with child, and unsustained by the hardened, defiant spirit of her mother, she could not muster courage to face her betrayed husband. Nor did she make any effort, in writing or otherwise, to cajole him into a belief that Ritchie had been courting Mrs. Forsyth, proposed fleeing secretly with *her*, and carrying off money she never possessed.

She must have felt it would be useless to attempt doing so. Fergusson, with all the circumstances and allegations before him, was not for an instant the dupe of the audacious fiction. As soon as possible he consulted a man of law as to the practicability of obtaining a divorce. That course, it was ultimately decided, was not open to him, the evidence, legally viewed, of his wife's adultery being altogether insufficient to support a divorce suit in the Scottish courts.

That being so, Mr. Fergusson having determined on selling his property and quitting Scotland, entered, through a law-agent, into a negotiation with his wife, to whom he offered to pay, once for all, a large sum of money—one thousand pounds—upon condition that she subscribed a bond of perpetual separation, and solemnly admitted that the expected child was Ritchie's. Mrs. Fergusson had, meanwhile, left Clyde Cottage, taken lodgings in Glasgow, and was supposed to be in correspondence with her mother and Ritchie. Encouraged and stimulated by advice from that quarter, the shameless woman stood out for better terms, and finally obtained fifteen hundred pounds as the price of freeing her husband, as far as she had the power of freeing him, from the fetters of matrimony.

Before Mr. Fergusson could realise his property, and bid a final adieu to Scotland, his wife had been delivered of a male child, and was living in open shame with Ritchie, in the immediate neighbourhood of Glasgow. They cohabited only till the money was dissipated—about three years—when Ritchie betook himself to sea again, and was afterwards only heard of at long intervals apart, and doubtfully. He was said to be engaged in the West India trade. Abandoned by Ritchie, Mrs. Fergusson and her mother re-established themselves in a poor way as mantua-makers, struggled on for a year or two, and then vanished, no one knew or cared to inquire whither. The little boy, when they disappeared from Glasgow, was about five years old, and a fine robust child for that age.

I have now given as succinctly as I could the substance of the facts and fancies with which Mr. Cumming, a writer to the *Signet*, upon whom I had waited, by superior order, at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, had favoured me from his very

prolix notes, when a lady and young boy entered the room. Mr. Cumming rose and said—

“Good morning, madam. This gentleman is a detective officer, whose services we have been advised to engage.” Mr. Cumming, I should state, was the gentleman who drew up the deed of separation, twenty years before, between Mr. Fergusson and his wife.

The lady having bowed slightly, sat down with an air as if she intended to be present during the remainder of our conference.

She was a warm-complexioned, interesting woman, in apparently delicate health; and her son, a slightly-framed, intelligent boy, twelve or thirteen years of age, looked as if he had but recently recovered from severe sickness. His mother was, I afterwards knew, a French Creole; her place of birth the island of St. Croix, in the West Indies. She, however, spoke English with fluency.

“One moment,” exclaimed Mr. Cumming, in reply to my request that he would proceed; “one moment!” He rang the bell, and directed the servant who answered it to show Captain Hardman into that room directly he called. “He will ask for Mrs. Fergusson,” added the lawyer.

“Mrs. Fergusson!” I involuntarily exclaimed, with a sharp glance at the lady sitting a few yards off; “Mrs. Fergusson!”

“Yes, Mrs. Fergusson,” replied Mr. Cumming, with some embarrassment, whilst the rich colour suffused the lady’s face and neck, “but not, of course, the limb of Satan who—”

“I think,” interrupted the lady, rising abruptly, and with some haughtiness of tone, “I think, Mr. Cumming, you can very well dispense with my presence here. You can acquaint me with the result of your consultation with the officer after he has left. Do not forget,” she added, “to tell Captain Hardman I am anxious to see him before he leaves the hotel.”

Mr. Cumming replied that he would be sure to deliver her message; and the lady, with a scarcely perceptible bow to me, left the room with her son.

“By the way you must have heard of Captain Hardman?” said Mr. Cumming.

"I cannot say that I have."

"John Hardman, captain of the Europa, which was wrecked not long since on the Galway coast."

"I remember now, and that he displayed great coolness and gallantry on that occasion."

"Very much so indeed. He will be an important member of our council, and I hope he will soon be here. I was telling you, Waters," resumed the man of law, "I was telling you, Waters, when Mrs. Fer—he-em—when the lady who has just left the room interrupted us, that James Fergusson, having washed his hands for ever, as he believed, of the limb of Satan he had the misfortune to make bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, sailed first to London, thence to the West Indies, and finally settled in the Island of Jamaica. He had been there," continued Mr. Cumming, "about six years—rather longer, perhaps—and was prospering beyond his hopes, when he received, through me, news of his wife's death. That news came to me in a whining letter from Mrs. Forsyth, stating that her daughter had died the day before humbly repentant, and in a state of almost penury. The mother begged piteously for the sum of five pounds to put her daughter decently under ground, and I was ass enough to send her ten upon my own responsibility, though *why* I should have done so I cannot, for the life of me, explain to myself. By the same post as the woman's letter a Liverpool newspaper reached me, in the obituary of which were these words strongly underlined: 'Died yesterday, after a short illness, at her lodgings on Copperas Hill, Helen, wife of James Fergusson, formerly of Clyde Cottage, near Glasgow.'

"The ten-pound note was gratefully acknowledged," Mr. Cumming went on to say, "and I was informed that Mrs. Forsyth was about to immediately leave Liverpool for London, taking the boy with her. I had already forwarded the woman's first letter and the newspaper to James Fergusson, and I despatched the second also. Three months afterwards I received his reply, enclosing a draft for the ten pounds, and announcing his marriage with Julie Le Maistre, of the island of St. Croix, with whose family he had been long acquainted. We may pass over the next dozen years, during which I heard but little of James Fergusson, and that casually. He continued, I was told,

to prosper greatly in business, everything he touched turning to gold as it were; but unfortunately as he grew in riches he declined in health. As nearly as may be a twelvemonth ago," continued the lawyer, "Fergusson returned to Scotland for the purpose of obtaining the highest medical opinion upon his case, and with the hope that a visit to the old country might of itself prove a potent restorative. Whilst in Scotland he called frequently upon me, and as there seemed to be no hope entertained of his permanent recovery, I, in as urgent terms as I could permit myself to use, advised him to settle his worldly affairs without delay, as, in the event of his dying intestate, the boy by his first wife, if he were still alive—and those slips of Satan never die—would take all the real property he might die possessed of, and divide the personals with his one son by the second wife; the woman's written declaration that the child was Ritchie's availing nothing in law, as I told him at the time. He promised compliance, but nevertheless left for London without having made, or given instructions for, a will. Many persons have a strong repugnance to the making of wills. It smells too much of mortality—Ah, here's our friend Hardman! This gentleman," added Mr. Cumming, as soon as he and the bluff seaman had shaken hands, "this gentleman is Mr. Waters, the detective officer, of whom you have no doubt heard. He will help us to get at the bottom of this damnable business."

Captain Hardman was polite enough to say that he *had* heard me spoken favourably of, and wished me success with all his heart, though he feared that the bottom of this particular damnable business, as his friend Mr. Cumming truly called it, if it had a bottom at all, was far too deep to be reached by the most skilful soundings.

"Time will show," said Mr. Cumming, "and our present object, of course, is to place our vulpine friend here in full possession of all particulars."

"I was saying," continued the lawyer, "that the late Mr. Fergusson——"

"Late Mr. Fergusson! He is dead, then?" interrupted I, half involuntarily.

"Yes, poor fellow! He was a passenger in the *Europa*, and was, unhappily, drowned. I was saying," again resumed Mr.

Cumming, "that the late Mr. Fergusson left Glasgow without making a will. Nor did he take any steps in the matter for some time after he reached London. The pressing necessity for doing so had, he probably believed, passed away, inasmuch as he wrote to Mrs. Fergusson to say that he had benefited so much by the London medical treatment that he had little doubt he should return to Jamaica a new man at the expiration of about three months, for which time he had determined to remain in England. That letter arrived in Jamaica by one mail, and with the next, taken out by the *Europa*, went Mr. Fergusson himself, in a state not only of extreme physical debility, but mental distraction; so changed, in fact, that his wife scarcely recognised him. It was inexplicable at the time, but perfectly clear now."

Captain Hardman observed that he, too, was much struck by the change he saw in Mr. Fergusson when he came on board the *Europa* to engage a passage. He had seen him three or four days previously, when he seemed to be in much improved health and excellent spirits; and there he was, a broken-spirited and an apparently dying man.

"He was singularly, one might almost say childishly, sensitive where his affections were concerned. Besides, upon one in his feeble state an afflictive stroke takes infinitely more effect than upon a person in strong health. Upon arriving in Jamaica," continued the lawyer, "Fergusson, instead of going to his own place in the hills, took up his abode at the Royal Hotel, Kingston, with his new friend Saunders; refused the society of his wife; and, except for a few minutes at a time, and eagerly, passionately, as it were, applied himself to the task of realising his property. There was not much difficulty in that, consisting, as it almost entirely did, of sugar, tobacco, and rum, of which he had been for many years a large buyer and exporter. Upon this occasion he, however, decided to resell in the island, his impression being that he should not live till the goods could be disposed of in England. The important business of realisation accomplished, Mr. Fergusson remitted the bulk of the proceeds to London for investment in Consols, in which securities he was previously interested to a large amount. Next he forwarded to his wife by

Saunders a sealed packet, one thousand pounds in cash, and a letter, a copy of which I hold in my hand. I had better read it:—

“BELOVED JULIE,—I send you by my good friend Saunders one thousand pounds, and it is my earnest request that you at once embark for France with our son. Your relatives there have long desired to see you amongst them. Place yourself, dearest, without delay under their protection. *My* days are numbered, be assured, and but few, very few, remain to me. The sealed packet contains my will. It secures everything to you and Jamie, and will explain all; but do not, I beseech you, open the packet till I am no more. I am not equal, beloved Julie, to a parting interview; but that God may bless you and our child with His choicest blessings is the constant prayer, and will be the latest aspiration, of

“Your devotedly affectionate JAMES FERGUSSON.”

“I must pass over many things,” continued the man of law. “Enough to say that Mrs. Fergusson did sail for Havre with her son without seeing her husband. A month afterwards Mr. Fergusson himself embarked in the *Europa*, the same ship in which he had last sailed from England. Mr. Saunders accompanied him.”

“Who is this Mr. Saunders?” I asked.

“Well, Mr. Waters, that’s a bit of a riddle,” replied Captain Hardman. “He’s a Scot and a seaman: there’s no doubt whatever upon those two points. He came on board the *Europa*, and paid for a passage to Jamaica the same day, and I think an hour or two after poor Fergusson had engaged *his* berth. He’s an uncommon fair-spoken chap, and got wonderfully thick with Fergusson during the voyage out. I fancy he had known people in Scotland that Fergusson did, and was acquainted with transactions in which Fergusson, when a young man, had been mixed up.

“During the voyage home,” continued the captain at a gesture from Mr. Cumming, “during the voyage home Fergusson and Saunders were scarcely ever apart, except when in their sleeping berths. Fergusson, who was very ill and weak, could not shake off a nervous apprehension that he should not live to land in England, and one day informed me that in the event of his death taking place on board, his friend Mr. Saunders was authorised to take possession of all his (Fergusson’s) effects, papers, &c. Of course I had no right to interfere; yet, knowing

as I did that Fergusson had a large sum of money with him in bills at sight on London, I made bold to ask if Mr. Saunders was an *old* friend of his.

“‘No,’ he replied, ‘he is a new friend; but, I am sure, a true one. I never saw him to my knowledge till on our voyage out to Jamaica. I say to my knowledge,’ added Mr. Fergusson, ‘for I often fancy that I have seen or met with him somewhere many years ago. As he, however, has not the slightest recollection of me personally, it is, I dare say, merely fancy on my part.’”

“Go on, captain,” said Mr. Cumming.

“Well, I thought Mr. Fergusson’s health—his bodily health, that is—seemed to be in some degree benefited by the voyage, though his mind seemed to be totally unhinged. At last, after a fine run, which brought us within three or four days of the Downs, a sudden and violent change of weather took place, we were driven out of our course, and finally wrecked upon the west coast of Ireland. The night when the catastrophe occurred was a black and bitter one; there was little, in fact no chance of a boat reaching the shore in safety through the raging sea and surf; and I exhorted the passengers to stick by the ship, at all events, till daylight. But terror never reasons, or listens to reason. The lights on shore looked to be no further off than one might chuck a biscuit; and a number of passengers, amongst them Mr. Fergusson, fiercely insisted that a boat should be lowered, in which they might, at least, make an attempt to reach the shore, rather than remain to await certain death in the stranded Europa. I was busy in another part of the ship, but the first mate unfortunately yielded to their importunities. A boat was with great difficulty lowered, and into it—God knows how!—dropped or tumbled seven panic-stricken passengers; the boat was cast off, capsized before you could count twenty, and all the seven perished miserably.

Saunders had resolutely declined accompanying his friend Fergusson in the boat. He was, as I have said before, though dressed landsman fashion, and calling himself one, an unmistakable seaman, and consequently knew better. Well, to make this part of the story as short as possible, most of those who stuck by the wreck were got off in safety the next



morning, the hurricane having by that time sensibly abated. Amongst those saved was Saunders, and he took off with him, secured in an oil-skin waterproof bag, which he had belted on at the first appearance of real danger—at the request, mind you, of Fergusson, made in my hearing—the papers and other property, securities for money, he himself told me, that had belonged to Fergusson. During the day,” added Captain Hardman, “the body, amongst others, of poor Fergusson was washed ashore, identified by me and others, and as soon as possible interred. Saunders started on the morrow for London. And this, Mr. Cumming and Mr. Detective Waters, is all I know of the matter.”

“Have the money securities intrusted to Saunders been handed over by that person to the deceased gentleman’s agents?”

“Yes, O yes!” said Mr. Cumming, “and that with the greatest promptitude and completeness. There is no suspicion of fraud in that direction. Mr. Saunders must have also posted without delay a brief letter, written by Fergusson to his wife, when the writer was in apprehension of almost immediate death. That letter, brief as it was, revealed to the distressed and astonished lady the cause of the strange conduct on her husband’s part which had so puzzled and grieved her. Whilst in London he met, by the merest accident, with his first wife—alive! The account of her death, easily inserted in the Liverpool paper upon payment of the usual charge, had been a mere device to obtain money. Possibly an ulterior purpose might even then have suggested itself to the conspirators.

“However that may be, the discovery was a dagger-stroke to Fergusson in his then enfeebled state of health.

“‘I have unwittingly done thee, dearest Julie,’ he wrote, ‘a cruel wrong, but in so far as it is possible to do so I have made amends. I, without an hour’s delay, directed a will to be prepared under the advice of eminent counsel, to whom all the circumstances were fully stated. The will, so prepared, was executed in duplicate, one copy of which thou hast’—(the letter was written in French)—‘in the sealed parcel; the other is in my possession. Thou wilt find that it leaves to Julie Le Maistre, reputed and supposed by me to be my lawful wife till the

infamous deception practised upon me was discovered, all properties and moneys of which I should die possessed for her life, and at her death, to her son James, my lawfully-begotten son, as I had for many happy years believed.' The letter," added Mr. Cumming, "advised the lady to apply to me in any difficulty that might arise ; hence I am now here."

"What, then, is the difficulty which I am to assist in overcoming ? The will puts everything to rights, and claps, moreover, an extinguisher upon a surmise that was taking fast hold of my mind."

"You have not yet heard all," said Mr. Cumming. "No will has been found ; no will was delivered up with the papers which Mr. Saunders brought on shore from the Europa. More—far more puzzling still—Mrs. *Julia* Fergusson, as we may for the nonce call her, found, upon opening the sealed parcel, that it contained nothing but blank paper."

"The devil !"

"The devil—yes, and his angels to boot. It is certain, besides, that the said parcel has never been out of Mrs. *Julia* Fergusson's possession—that the seals were intact when she broke them. Can you read us this riddle, Mr. Detective Waters ?"

"Perhaps not ; but we shall see. Of course the son by the first marriage has already claimed the property, as being heir-at-law ?"

"Yes ; through Messrs. Smart and Figes, a highly respectable firm. His mother read the account of the death, by drowning, of James Fergusson, formerly of Clyde Cottage, near Glasgow, and since of Jamaica, in the newspapers."

"Of course—of course. Could you, Captain Hardman, favour us with a description of Mr. Saunders ? What kind of a man is he personally ?"

"Well, he is a tall man—five feet ten or eleven ; has dark hair, tinged with grey ; tanned, but once fair complexion ; sharp grey eyes ; and his age is, I should say, forty-five, or thereabout."

"And he, who you are sure is a Scot and a seaman, you have reason to believe had known people in Scotland whom Fergusson once knew there, and is familiar with events with which Fergusson in his youth had been mixed up. Mr. Fergusson had

also a dim notion that he had met Saunders somewhere some years before. Once only, I am pretty sure, and that once was when he surprised him in Glasgow with his wife, Mrs. Fergusson."

"What the devil, Waters, do you mean?" shouted the Scottish lawyer, half springing from his chair, and glaring at me with distended eyes.

"My meaning is plain enough. This—that the description given of Saunders by Captain Hardman, looked at in connection with the other points I have indicated, spell Adam Ritchie, if there is any reliance to be placed upon circumstantial orthography."

"By heaven, it may be so—it may be so!" ejaculated Mr. Cumming. "There is a kind of likelihood about it. A Scot, a seaman, tall, the age, too! Stop, we are too fast. What conceivable advantage could Adam Ritchie propose to himself in going out to Jamaica and returning with Mr. Fergusson? He could not surely foresee that the Europa would be wrecked, and Mr. Fergusson drowned?"

"No; but he would see as plainly as Captain Hardman did that Mr. Fergusson was dying. He knew that all he had to fear was a will; and had not fortune favoured him as it has done, who shall say what desperate means he might not have resorted to for the compassing of his ends. Familiar, confidential intimacy with Mr. Fergusson was everything to him."

"Well, but, Mr. Waters, supposing that Saunders, being Adam Ritchie, has purloined the copy of the will kept by Mr. Fergusson in his own possession, how, in the name of Beelzebub, could he abstract the copy said to be contained in the sealed parcel, which parcel had never left Mrs. Julia Fergusson's hands, and the seals of which were intact when she opened it?"

"I have it here in my notes that the parcel was sent to Mrs. Julia Fergusson, as you call her, by Mr. Saunders. That worthy, of course, knew that the accompanying letter forbade her to open the parcel till after her husband's death. Mr. Fergusson's seal would be easily procurable by Saunders, and what then so easy as to open the parcel, substitute blank paper for the will, re-make and re-seal the parcel? *Tut!* the whole thing is as clear as daylight, always supposing Saunders to be Ritchie.

The worst of it is that, if such be probably the fact, we shall be none the forwarder—in no better position than before.”

“Why not?—how not?”

“What will that fact, if it be one really, do for us? We shall be no nearer recovering the purloined will by proving that Adam Ritchie passed himself off to Mr. Fergusson as one Saunders.”

“True, true. What is your game, then? or have you none?”

“I don’t say that yet. I hardly need ask if Saunders has disappeared, or if Adam Ritchie shows himself.”

“Saunders is said to be gone abroad. Ritchie we had not thought of.”

“You have, I presume, obtained the heir-at-law’s private address?”

“He has taken up his quarters at the George and Blue Boar, Holborn. His mother and grandmother are both there with him. Shall you call on them?”

“Not at present. It occurs to me that one or more of the trio must, ere this, have made the acquaintance of the police. I must inquire.”

I rose to go, Mr. Cumming not looking over-pleased. The truth was, I had been bored quite as much as interested by his long, prolix narrative; and had the while, mechanically as it were, helped myself more freely than was my wont to the wine on the table. Hence my manner was not so subdued, so respectful as it might have been, and there was a crowing bounceableness in my enumeration of, and comments upon, the very obvious points of the case which he had strangely missed, that was in bad taste, taking into account our relative social positions, and certainly not habitual with me.

It was impossible to apologise in words; but as he was evidently very desirous of success in the business before us, one reason being, perhaps, that he had himself been duped by the newspaper artifice, I stayed my steps and said—

“I believe, sir, we shall be able to trip these people’s heels up yet. Ritchie, if he be Saunders—and I may, after all, be mistaken on that point—but if Ritchie be Saunders, and has purloined the will, he will hardly be such a fool as to place it out of his own power to *compel* the heir-at-law, over whom—

whether his natural son or not—he has no legal control, to *share* Mr. Fergusson's wealth with him. To hold that power he must keep the will safe, and in his own immediate custody, till the plunder is divided. Therein lies our best chance of success; and nothing, be assured, sir, shall be wanting on my part to insure it."

As I spoke the cloud of offended self-love vanished from the lawyer's brow, and we parted excellent friends.

I was soon in possession of all come-at-able facts in the family history of Mrs. Forsyth; but these were not of much importance. The first thing was to find Ritchie, and a pretty chase I was led in the endeavour to do so. An emissary, as I afterwards knew, of Mrs. Forsyth, who early discovered who I was in search of, sent me off to Glasgow, furnished, for a consideration, with the name of the street and the number of the house in which he was concealed. I returned from that fool's errand in no very amiable humour the reader may be sure, but all the more thoroughly resolved to find my man if he was above ground. I had several chances in my favour. The heir-at-law, who had been drunk nearly ever since Messrs. Smart and Figs advanced the family money upon the succession which it seemed impossible to dispute, though kept strict guard over by his grandmother, more than once gave her the slip, and was cautiously tracked to various places. Nothing, however, came of it. I persevered, nevertheless, and the more hopefully after ascertaining, as I did beyond a doubt, that Ritchie had called upon Mrs. Forsyth and his reputed son on the very day that "Saunders" reached London from the Galway coast. At last I discovered that Mrs. Forsyth had once or twice risen at dawn of day, and quietly left the hotel, closely wrapped up, when no one but the night-porter was about, a dull fellow who had not noticed the circumstance, or at all events had not spoken of it. A few days only elapsed before I knew that Mrs. Forsyth's early visits were made at a shoemaker's in Castle Street, Leicester Square, one Parsons, a simple fellow, whom I happened to know very well. I sent for Parsons to a tavern in the neighbourhood, and was readily supplied with all the information he could give me. He said there was a lodger in his house, who had been there about four weeks, and called himself

Bradley. He paid his way honestly, and never went out except in the evening, to smoke his pipe at the Shoulder of Mutton, an out-of-the-way public-house, not far from Newport Market. Latterly he had only been visited once or so in the week, and desperate early in the morning, by an elderly female; but when he first came to lodge there a stout, boisterous young fellow used to come with the said elderly female, and precious rows there used to be with them—all about money, as well as he could make out.

"Once," added Parsons, "they both came in the evening when Bradley was out, marched into his room, and turned everything in it topsy-turvy, ransacked the bedding, searched under the bedstead, and on the top of the tester, looked up and poked up the chimney, and turned all the drawers out. I was watching them, you must know, from a convenient peeping-hole, as I didn't know but what they meant to walk off with something. They didn't, however, and at last went away, growling like hungry bears. When Bradley came home, of course I told him of the game his friends or relations, or whatever they were, had been playing upstairs; and, if you'll believe me, he fell a laughing fit to burst himself for ever so long, to think, he said, how nicely they had been disappointed. I don't exactly like such goings on," concluded Parsons, "and only that Bradley pays regular, and is freeish with his money, I should soon give him notice to quit."

If Bradley was Ritchie and Saunders, the case was now clear enough. That point was settled by procuring Mr. Cumming and Captain Hardman a private peep at the gentleman as he, in serene mood, sat smoking in the parlour of the Shoulder of Mutton public-house. Bradley was Saunders, and Saunders was Ritchie: there was no further question of that.

What should be the next step? or rather, how should it be taken? Where did Ritchie keep the will, which I had not the faintest doubt he had purloined, and was holding *in terrorem* over the heir-at-law and his avaricious grandame? Not at his lodgings, as his mocking hilarity, when he heard of the unsuccessful search, testified. Yet he went nowhere, except to the Shoulder of Mutton public-house, and it was altogether unlikely that he would part for a moment with the actual possession of

such an important instrument. The only conclusion I could therefore come to was, that he must have it concealed about his person—sewed up, probably, beneath the lining of the rough coat he wore.

Aye, but how to ascertain if my surmise was correct or not? No magistrate would listen for a moment to an application for a warrant to arrest and search a man upon such altogether conjectural evidence as I could offer. Time pressed, too, as Messrs. Smart and Figs were rapidly pushing on proceedings, and it was impossible to dispute that the claimant was the true heir-at-law.

But one alternative presented itself; and after consulting with Mr. Cumming, and obtaining his written undertaking to hold me and others harmless in respect of damages in any action for assault and battery, false imprisonment, &c., that might be brought against us, it was put in practice.

The thing was easily done. Two or three minutes after he emerged from the Shoulder of Mutton, Ritchie, *alias* Saunders, was run violently against by a respectably-dressed man, who instantly collared him, and shouted, "Police! police!" with all his power of lungs. I and another officer were up directly, and the respectably-dressed stranger roundly charged Ritchie with an attempt to rob him of his watch, which, in fact, was dangling outside the fob, as if the effort to snatch it away had failed. Of course there was nothing for it but to walk accused and accuser off to the nearest station-house.

Arrived there, Ritchie, whom the preposterous charge had so utterly confounded, stunned, that he had not uttered a syllable since it was made, suddenly found his tongue, and, not satisfied with hurling volley after volley of abuse at the accuser, fiercely attempted to fight his way out. This, of course, did not help him in the opinion of the inspector. The charge was regularly entered, signed by Charles Jones, 18, York Street, Pimlico, and Adam Ritchie was a legally constituted-prisoner.

The decisive business of searching was next to be gone through; and Ritchie, who, finding violence of no avail, had sullenly calmed down, himself turned out his pockets. When, however, I, suddenly pressing my hands upon his back, and feeling the crumple of parchment, exclaimed, "All right—here

is Mr. Fergusson's missing will!" he dropped without a word upon the floor as if smitten down by a thunderbolt!

The will recovered, and probate obtained thereon, Julie Le Maistre and her friends were quite satisfied, and refused to prosecute Ritchie. They were, of course, naturally averse to its being blown abroad that she had not been, however blamelessly on her part, the legal wife of Mr. Fergusson, whose name she therefore continued to bear.

Upon stricter inquiry it was found that Mrs. Forsyth's daughter was free from complicity in Ritchie's last crime, and that she had steadily refused, since she left Scotland, to have any acquaintance with him. At Mr. Cumming's suggestion a moderate annuity was settled upon her by the lucky legatee, and it was determined to provide in some way for the boy. I have never heard what ultimately became of him or of Mrs. Forsyth. Ritchie emigrated, I was told, to Australia. Possibly they went with him.





## CHAPTER XX.

## “FOUND DROWNED ”

EARLY on a calm summer morning, now many years ago, the naked body of a middle-aged man was discovered on the shore westward of Cowes, in the Isle of Wight, near a place called by the fantastical name of Egypt. The deceased's clothes were found at a short distance from the body, and the natural presumption was that he had been drowned whilst bathing. A valuable gold watch, and a purse containing a considerable sum of money, were safe in a pocket of his trousers; but no letters or papers that could lead to his identification were found. He was a stranger in the Wight, and it was soon ascertained that he had been stopping for the previous three or four weeks at the Fountain Inn, West Cowes, where he was known as Mr. Jones. This misnomer was rectified by Mr. Hearne, a solicitor of Newport, who knew him to be James Blake, landlord of the Three Tuns, St. Giles's, London, and that he had come to the island in avoidance of his creditors, till such time as an offered composition should have been successfully carried out. Blake had consulted Mr. Hearne professionally, out of mere impatient restlessness of mind it seemed, and so far disclosed his position, as well as his real name; but it appearing that an attorney was acting for him in London, Mr. Hearne declined to interfere in the business. Blake having first tendered a fee, which was not accepted, went away, and was not seen again by the solicitor till, hearing of his death, Mr. Hearne presented himself before the inquest to identify the body, and state what he knew of the deceased. The verdict returned, after a slight, slovenly inquiry, was an open one—"Found drowned."

The press, as it has done a thousand times before and since in

much more important instances, remedied the shortcomings of the regular "institution" by giving publicity to the proceedings. The *Times* copied the report from the *Hampshire Advertiser*, one immediate consequence of which was that Mrs. Arnold, a widowed sister of the deceased, who carried on a considerable grocery business in the Borough, put herself in communication with the authorities at Scotland Yard. The statement she made induced the Commissioner to dispatch me forthwith to the Isle of Wight, with instructions to make a thorough inquiry into all the circumstances connected with Blake's death, and report them to head-quarters before acting *executively* in the affair.

I put up at the Fountain Inn, Cowes, and was soon in possession of all particulars known to Mr. Roper, the very intelligent landlord. Jones, otherwise Blake, had arrived at Cowes by the Southampton boat, and been brought by the Fountain's *touter* to that inn. The man's luggage consisted of one portmanteau only. He appeared to be in an exceedingly distressed state of mind, and indulged in drink to excess; so much so that Mrs. Roper had frequently refused to serve him with more liquor, whereupon he would leave the house in great dudgeon, and procure what he wanted of less scrupulous spirit-vendors. He paid promptly, ungrudgingly; and till he heard Mr. Hearne's evidence before the inquest, Mr. Roper had not the slightest suspicion that his lodger was embarrassed as to money matters. His own somewhat hazy impression was that domestic trouble of a yet more afflictive kind than indebtedness had driven him from his home, forasmuch that, when more than usually muddled and maddened with drink, his broken babble was ever harping upon the deceitfulness and villany of wives in general, and of Mrs. Jones in particular—an incoherent, paraphrastic echo, as it were, of Othello's exclamation—"Why did I marry?"

One thing had much surprised Mr. Roper. The deceased was often seen conning over well-thumbed papers, yet no scrap of writing was found either in the pockets of the clothes on the beach or in his portmanteau. The landlord had called the attention of the coroner to this circumstance; but that functionary, a well-meaning but drowsy septuagenarian, attached no

importance to it. The deceased, added Mr. Roper, was frequently in the habit of sleeping at other houses, so that his non-appearance, when the Fountain closed for the night before the discovery of the body on the beach, excited no alarm, scarcely a remark. It was new to him, however, to find that Jones or Blake was addicted to bathing, especially at so very early an hour of the morning.

Mr. Roper added that a letter had been received by him from Mrs. Blake since the publication of the proceedings before the inquest in the *Times*, in which, after a few curt, common-place sentences expressive of a decent grief for what had happened, the bereaved widow requested him to forward the deceased's portmanteau to the Three Tuns. Mrs. Blake had also, I was informed, promptly claimed the gold watch and the balance of the money in her husband's possession at his death, which remained after the cost of the funeral, &c., had been defrayed.

So much for the landlord of the Fountain. My next care was to seek out Sims and Rose, the two men who first discovered the body.

They were dull, obtuse fellows, from whom it was difficult to get anything except a constant iteration that they *did* find the body stark naked upon the beach. I reminded them that they had incidentally deposed to a seemingly strange fact—that the drowned man's garments, namely, had been found apart from each other—as if, I suggested, *they had been laid out to dry upon the beach*. They did not seem to comprehend a meaning in my suggestion, but agreed that the garments were separate—the coat here, the trousers there, and so on. "And all," added Sims, "were soak wet too, except the shirt, which was pretty dry."

The two men went with me to Egypt, and whilst there an elderly seafaring man of the name of Morgan came up and talked with us. He casually remarked that, if the clothes were found so high up on the beach as the men stated, the tide at that particular time could not have reached and soaked them, as had been, he saw by the paper, supposed. Sims and Rose, themselves sailors—boatmen at least—acquiesced in Morgan's assertion after some debate, whilst admitting that it had never struck them before.

“It is curious, too,” said Morgan, a very shrewd fellow, “it is curious, too (and I have thought the thing over more than once), that if Blake or Jones was drowned whilst out bathing—and, as the sand shelves here, he must have been a good way out to get drowned—that the body should have floated back to just where he left his clothes; it being, according to my experience, a hundred, aye, a thousand, to one that it would have drifted, with the strong tide-current hereabout, far away either westward or eastward.” Morgan added that he had seen in his time several drowned persons, but not one whose face bore the impress of convulsive agony, as, according to the paper, Blake’s did. Sims remarked upon that, that the “doctors,” after a strict search, had not been able to find the least mark of violence upon the corpse. This was true, and Morgan’s last observation did not, consequently, make any impression upon me.

Returned to the Fountain, I found a Mrs. Barnes awaiting me there. She had heard that a London “runner” was come to inquire all about the man that was found drowned near Egypt, and she wished to tell him something which the coroner said had nothing to do with the case, and which he would not take down. That something was that she had seen the deceased walking about late in the evening previous to the morning when he was found drowned, in company with two men, whom she had never seen before or since to her knowledge. One was tall and stoutish; the other, thinner and shorter, limped a little. It was a moonlit night, but she was not near enough to be sure of knowing them again; neither did she particularly remark how they were dressed, except that they were well dressed.

No further information being obtainable, I returned to London, and, under instruction, followed up the inquiry there, commencing at the Three Tuns, over the doors of which the name of Mary was already substituted for that of James Blake.

A remark of Mrs. Arnold’s, that it was almost impossible that her brother could have been insolvent, was confirmed, to my mind, by the business doing at the Three Tuns. There was a constant influx of rough, ready-money customers, to serve whom tasked the energies of three waiters, who were, moreover, kept well to collar by the vigilant superintendence of the recently widowed landlady herself. Mrs. Blake was a fierce-eyed, vixenish-looking,

yet buxom woman, about thirty years of age, and was, I knew, her late husband's second wife. She was dressed off in richest mourning, wore a splendid gold watch and chain, and could not be mistaken for anything but what she was—a vain, smart shrew. As to grief for her husband's untimely death, not the faintest trace of such a feeling could be discerned in her prettyish, insolent face, or the sharp tones of her hectoring voice. Boldly, impudently, nevertheless, as she flaunted herself before the servants, and the sodden, drink-degraded crew that frequented the house, I more than once detected, or fancied I did, flitting indications of an inward terror, which, spite of a determined will, ever and anon revealed itself in flurried, fearful glances, sudden pallor, startings at shadows. She was not, I further noted, addicted in the least degree to drink. The fire of her fierce black eyes was fed by a more powerful stimulant, I judged, than alcohol.

Barelay and Perkins supplied the ale and porter sold at the Three Tuns. It was not, therefore, difficult to ascertain, in a quiet way, if the deceased Blake had been, as alleged, in insolvent circumstances. This duty I, for more reasons than one, devolved upon an acquaintance not belonging to the force, who was personally known to a managing man in Barelay and Co.'s service. My friend promptly ascertained that Blake had always been in flourishing circumstances—that his liabilities were always punctually met. It was added that a few months after his marriage with the present Mrs. Blake, of whom he had soon become madly jealous, he took to drinking to such excess as to have been twice in danger of death by delirium tremens, and was so constantly lost to self-control that his wife took the entire superintendence of the business, and all pertaining thereto, upon herself, never consulting or permitting him to interfere in the slightest matter; whilst, instead of endeavouring to check his insane craving for liquor, that was the sole indulgence in which no restriction was placed upon him. She might, therefore, for some evil purpose best known to herself, have instilled a belief into his drink-crazed brain that he had fallen into insolvency; and to get rid of him for a time, it might be, have suggested that to avoid a jail he had better for a few weeks or months remain out of the way of his creditors. My friend could not find out that there

had been any positive cause for Blake's jealous frenzies, much less if there was any one especially favoured by the wanton wife, if wanton wife she had been.

Shadowy, unsubstantial facts and fancies those from which to elicit conclusions of much practical significance, it may be thought. Nevertheless, with patience and perseverance, talismans which rarely fail to unveil the most closely shrouded mysteries, I had little doubt of ultimately ascertaining the whole truth with respect to the catastrophe on the beach near Egypt.

It was essential, I soon found, to delude Mrs. Blake into the tranquillising belief that certain grave suspicions, which had their origin in a communication made to the police by her malevolent sister-in-law, Mrs. Arnold, had been found, after strict inquiry, to be wholly groundless, and that the secret surveillance to which I had been for some time quite sure she felt or feared herself subjected had ceased by superior order, in the propriety of which I myself fully concurred. That communication I resolved to make with direct abruptness to the widow herself—a manner of proceeding which might go far to confirm or weaken the strong opinion I entertained that she was in some way accessory, before or after the fact, to the murder of her husband. That James Blake *had* been foully murdered I felt no doubt whatever.

Five or six days after my first visit to the Three Tuns, Mrs. Blake discovered that I was a detective officer. Since that alarming hint had been whispered in her ear—I afterwards knew by whom—she invariably, when I entered the house, left the bar, as quickly as possible without exciting too much remark, retiring into a small room behind, and thence, unobserved as she supposed, reconnoitring me and my movements through the Venetian blind which screened her from the gaze of waiters and customers. There was a side door in the passage which opened into the said parlour, beside that communicating with the bar; but it was, I quietly ascertained, fastened in the inside, so that there was no possibility of abruptly confronting the lady, when alone, except by springing over the bar-counter—a mode of action that would answer well enough had I a warrant for her apprehension, but was not at all adapted to further the immediate end I had in view. Still it was through

the side door that Mrs. Blake's meals were brought to her, and I suspected that it was only when I was present that an inner bolt was drawn, and she thereby secured, at all events, against *sudden* intrusion. The obvious plan, then, was to place a confederate on the watch, who, quietly appearing at the street door, within sight of and near which I should take care to be at about her dinner hour, would enable me to enter the bar-parlour close upon the heels of the servant.

This very simple ruse succeeded completely. I appeared in the room just as Mrs. Blake was in the act of removing the cover from a hot roast fowl, which, with other delicacies, had been placed upon the table. At sight of me the woman gave a short, spasmodic scream, and let fall the dish-cover, thereby smashing the dish containing the fowl, and making a sad mess upon the damask table-cloth, which was not whiter than her cheeks suddenly became.

Those signs of terror were so easy of interpretation, that, with all my practised self-command, I had some difficulty in preventing her—scared, confounded as she was—from plainly reading that interpretation in my face. My course of action having been, however, maturely considered, was not to be jeopardised by a premature publication of my thoughts, and I said civilly, in reply to her gasping—"What!—who!—what!"—

"What do I here, you would ask, madam? A natural query, to which I answer that I have sought you out by order of the police authorities."

"Police!—sought me!—police!" she ejaculated distractedly, and glancing wildly round as if to flee—to escape.

"Yes, madam, by order of the chief police authorities, and with the purpose of apologising for the annoyance I *know* you have felt at finding yourself suspected of at least complicity in a great crime, and closely watched in consequence. That suspicion was raised by the insinuations of Mrs. Arnold, your very prejudiced sister-in-law, to which gross insinuations our inquiries, I am directed to state, have assigned their proper value."

"I—I understand," said Mrs. Blake, as the blood stole back to her cheeks, and she sank trembling, though in a considerable

degree reassured, into the chair from which, at my entrance, she had upstarted. “I understand—the vile, infamous slanderer,” she presently added, “to insinuate that my husband was foully dealt with, and that I—I—”

Ever a formidable witness for the crown is a guilty conscience. I had not mentioned her husband!

“The affair,” said I, “is a very ordinary one in our experience. Your husband came to an untimely end—”

“Ha!”

“Your husband came to an untimely end by drowning, an every-day accident; and Mrs. Arnold, irritated, naturally enough, at finding that all her brother died possessed of had been devised unconditionally to you, imagined absurd conjectures, which the police were, of course, bound to rigorously investigate. That rigorous investigation has, I repeat, perfectly satisfied us as to the value of Mrs. Arnold’s innuendoes (for, after all, they were little more than innuendoes), and I beg to offer you my congratulations upon the result.”

It is needless to dwell further upon the details of my first interview with the landlady of the Three Tuns. Enough to say that I was entirely successful in convincing her that suspicion no longer attached to *any one* in connection with James Blake’s death; and so pleased was she with the bringer of such good news, that nothing would do but I must remain and dine with her. I did not require much pressing; a fresh cloth was laid, the fowl regrieved, and I made an excellent dinner, followed by a bottle of capital wine. Mrs. Blake permitted herself to take three or four glasses, for the evident purpose of gaining courage to ask a few questions relative to the known circumstances connected with her husband’s death. I of course knew nothing, had heard nothing, in addition to what she had herself read in the newspaper report of the inquest; and it would have been amusing, but for the horrible inference thereby suggested, to notice how gingerly, with what hesitating yet unappeasable eagerness, as one may say, she played round the question of questions, whether, namely, any one had been seen with him any time before his death.

“I mean, of course, a short time before his death—in the forepart of the morning when the body was found?”



"Strangers, do you mean—strangers in the island?"

Again the tell-tale blood rushed to her face, leaving it the next moment paler than before.

"Yes—that is, any one, I mean—strangers or not."

"No evidence was adduced that any one was seen with him, and certainly no stranger had even inquired for him at the inn where he was staying."

This was an immense relief, and in her joy of heart Mrs. Blake gaily helped herself to another glass of wine, drinking it too, as she had not before, with a relish.

I was puzzled. Blood-guiltiness is so terrible, so torturing a burden upon a struggling soul which has not been hardened, brutified by a long course of crime—in this instance impossible—as to defy anything but the strongest stimulants to but briefly lighten it, and even then a practised eye perceives that the relief is merely factitious—transitory. Yet Mrs. Blake's satisfaction, joy rather, was unmistakably genuine. The light in her eye, the smiling smack of her lips as she tossed off the last glass of wine, were signs of a real relief—not from the dread of detection, or, at least, not from that only, but from a haunting apprehension that a great crime had been committed! Might it not be, I asked myself, might it not be that, although she had conspired against her husband's peace and honour—might have wronged him grossly in other respects—she was innocent of having plotted against his life? The two strangers, I was more firmly than ever convinced, were James Blake's murderers, and I was sure Mrs. Blake *knew* those strangers. Still she might not have abetted or counselled such a crime—might now hope and *believe* it had not been committed!

I wished it might prove so, it being however quite evident to me that Mrs. Blake was to a certain extent, at all events, criminally involved in the matter. It would have been the merest folly to have questioned her as to whether she had any reason to suspect that strangers might have been with her husband just previously to his death. I therefore took my leave, more than ever convinced of the prudence of the course I intended to pursue. As is always the case in this country whenever a reasonable suspicion arises that a murder has been committed, no expense or exertion was spared to bring the

guilty parties to justice. In this instance I was instructed to follow up the inquiry at any cost of time or money, so long as the least chance remained of getting at the truth.

Thus urged, I recommenced operations by retaining the services of one Barton Brice, a clever chap of the Dick Swiveller class, whom you might confidently trust with anything except liquor. The Three Tuns took in lodgers, and Brice, who was unknown in the locality, presented himself, rather late one evening, at the bar, with a respectable carpet bag in his hand; called for drink, for which he paid from a handful of silver sparsely sprinkled with gold; finally got too *tight* to go farther that night, was accommodated with a bed, and altogether so snugly housed that he announced the next morning that he should not shift his quarters till he had got work, or till his tin was all gone. Barton Brice gave out that he was last from Liverpool, and his trade that of a seal-engraver.

There could be no objection to such an arrangement, and in a few days Barton Brice was a prime favourite with the waiters, chambermaid, and notably the evening parlour company at the Three Tuns, whom his comic songs hugely delighted. Mrs. Blake only so far noticed “that noisy, froth-headed fool” as to order the servants on no account to give him credit either for liquor or lodging. The moment he was out of cash he was to be put out of the house; and that, judging by the way he was going on, would not be long first.

Meanwhile Barton Brice, with both his eyes wide open, and the skin clean off, fishy and glazy as they usually looked, and hearkening with both his ears to the under-toned gossip of the parlour, heard sundry conjectures hazarded as to why a certain person, who was always there when poor Blake was alive, had not shown himself more than twice or thrice since. One garrulous worthy, somewhat obfuscated by gin and water, confidentially and candidly imparted his opinion to Brice that the said gentleman—he *was* a gentleman, there was no mistake about that—had found out that the “tin” did not come up to his mark, and he therefore cried off from the match.

“What match?” asked Brice. “A lucifer match?”

“Not bad! not bad! You are a humorous chap, you are! Lucifer match! That *would* be about the size of it. Madam

to a certainty would supply plenty of brimstone. Lucifer match ! Come, come—your health ! ”

“ Who’s to be Lucifer ? ”

Let me explain that these dialogues and other germane matter were forwarded to me by post nearly every day, and were, I doubt not, fancifully coloured by Barton Brice’s imaginative pen.

“ Who’s to be Lucifer ? ” exclaimed the gin-and-watery gent. “ Well, that’s one to you, at any rate.”

“ I mean who was to be, or who is to be, the husband of Madam Tartarus ? Not that I care to know anything about it, feeling as I do quite sure, bless the heavenly stars for it, that tain’t me.”

“ Who it was *supposed* would be Madam Spitfire’s husband, you mean ! Well, he’s a fine fellow of his inches, which may be about six feet, more or less, and carries his head very high indeed. Poor Blake was as afraid as he was jealous of him, or, muddle-headed fool as he was, there would have been the devil to pay, and no pitch hot, I can assure you.”

“ What did you say was his name ? ”

“ I never heard his real name. He was called Gentleman George, on account of his being like, as some thought, the picture of George the Fourth over the mantelshelf yonder.”

Barton Brice did not press his new acquaintance for further particulars, lest he should awaken a suspicion that he had some motive for being inquisitive about the said Gentleman George. Continuing, however, to keep his weather eye and ear open, he was rewarded by hearing that that gentleman had at last revisited his former and now widowed flame, and was at that moment with her in the bar-parlour.

This was great news, and Barton Brice, having first slyly obtained a good view of the visitor, kept strict watch till he left the house, and then stealthily followed him. Gentleman George hailed a hack from the nearest stand in Oxford Street, and drove rapidly off, followed in another by Brice, to High Street, Camden Town, where he alighted before a genteelish private house, knocked peremptorily at the door, and was admitted, not, however, having discharged the coach.

Brice was driven slowly past the house, the number of which

(47) he took down, and made a memorandum that a zinc plate on the door bore the name of Miss Osborne, teacher of the pianoforte and harp.

The hack had not been kept waiting more than about ten minutes when Gentleman George reappeared, and rattled off "To Hammersmith."

Arrived at Hammersmith, Gentleman George dismissed the coach, and entered a handsome dwelling with the air of a man who had reached home. Brice thereupon dismissed *his* vehicle, and betook himself to the Lion public-house, one of the windows of which commanded a view of the street door through which Gentleman George had disappeared.

Comfortably seated thereat, and supplied with the indispensable pot and pipe, Barton Brice set himself to gradually catechise the comely and coquettish servant-maid who attended upon him. Guardedly, forasmuch that the individual whose name and vocation he was desirous of ascertaining might be an occasional customer of the Lion's, and it was very desirable he should not hear that a stranger had been there inquiring about him.

Barton Brice asked the servant-girl if she knew where a gent lived, not far from the Lion he was sure, who had advertised for a groom. He, Brice, had seen the gent, and was as good as engaged, that is, if his character proved to be all right; and he had come to know if that were so, but had such a precious memory that he could not for the life of him recollect the gent's name, though it seemed every moment to be upon the tip of his tongue, like.

The waitress did not know of any one about there who was in want of a groom—no one. What kind of a gentleman was he?

Brice described his person and peculiar dress so accurately that the girl exclaimed, "Why, you must mean Mr. Hamilton, the artist, who lodges over yonder," pointing to the house which Gentleman George had gone into. "But surely *he* can't want a groom," she added.

"Hamilton! Hamilton! That sounds something like the name. Hamilton! An artist do you say?"

"Yes, a painter, and till not very long ago poor as Job. He dresses finely now, and so does a sweet pal of his, who in my

recollection was as seedy a scamp as one would clap one's eyes on between this and St. Paul's."

"One or both may have been left a fortune."

"They ain't either of them gone into mourning for it, at any rate. Talk of the devil," added the girl, "there he goes."

"Who?—the devil?"

"Not exactly; one of his children though. There, that's Ferris, Mr. Hamilton's crony. He is going to call upon his friend, who generally returns home at about this time. Look at him! Ain't he a splendid swell for a fellow that I know was kicked out of Mr. Farmer, the London lawyer's office, less than six months ago? The coxcombical puppy," added the young woman with a spiteful bitterness indicative of a peculiar and personal animosity, "the coxcombical puppy was glad, not long since, to get tick for a go of brandy, and now, forsooth, he turns up his snub nose at servants."

"Snub nose!" said Brice. "Now I call it rather a handsome nose, and Mr. Ferris himself a fineish chap, though he does limp a little."

"Handsome is as handsome does," retorted the irate waiting-maid, and was leaving the room when Brice, with sudden recollection, exclaimed—

"Allington! Allington! That's the name of the gent I'm looking for—not Hamilton—though the names sound something alike. I remember now."

"Mr. Allington!" said the girl. "Why, he lives half a mile from here, at Maberly Terrace." (Brice, who was not unacquainted with the neighbourhood, knew that as well as she did.)

"Maberly Terrace—that's the place! Lord, lord! what a thing it is to have such a wretched memory!" And so, having sucked all I wanted out of her, remarked Brice, in his note to me, I hooked it as quickly as possible.

In possession of the foregoing facts, and others unnecessary to set down, I forthwith commenced the campaign by a visit to No. 47, High Street, Camden Town, at an hour of the morning when there would be no danger of meeting with an artist of Mr. Hamilton's habits.

A very interesting young lady was Miss Osborne. Her features, though pensive and careworn, were finely cut, and but

for an indescribably sceptical, I might almost say sneering, expression which gleamed in her bright brown eyes, she would have been a singularly fascinating person—*was* so, I could have no doubt, to him or her whose proved truth rebuked and banished that mistrustful expression. Towards me her manner was disagreeably reserved—repulsive even. I daresay there was an unconscious smack of police-officerism about me which excited her suspicions, cleverly as, in my own opinion, I assumed to be Mr. Wollaston Smythe, desirous of obtaining the best instruction on the pianoforte and harp, compatible with his not too affluent circumstances, for three youthful daughters.

Miss Osborne would be glad, very glad indeed, to afford such instruction, and the young ladies might come as day boarders. Reference to *friends*, not merely professional references, essential? That was not a very usual stipulation, she believed; still, three pupils being a very desirable acquisition, she would give the names of several highly respectable persons who had known her long and intimately.

Furnished with those names—three in number—I took leave, and hastened to wait upon the parties. The first I called upon, Mrs. Sims, of Burton Crescent, widow of a retired draper, was not at home. The others could only say that Miss Osborne was a very deserving person, whose friends had been unfortunate in business, and whose exertions to support a bedridden mother were highly praiseworthy. Her skill as a musical teacher, a principal point with me of course, was unquestionable, and so on. Very good, but nothing to *my* purpose. Oddly enough that it had not struck me before—yet how on earth could I, when ostensibly seeking to ascertain if Miss Osborne was a proficient professor of music, and of course a reputable person, ask to be informed of the secrets of her domestic life? No doubt I had, in a manner unconsciously, calculated upon the gossiping garrulity of the young lady's friends to obtain at least suggestive information concerning her bachelor acquaintance, Mr. Hamilton. He and his limping crony, Ferris, were, I felt positive, the two men seen by Mrs. Barnes with James Blake shortly before his death. Their description by Brice tallied precisely with that given me by Mrs. Barnes, and the sudden betterment of their external condition added force to the suspi-

cion which naturally attached to Mrs. Blake's paramour. This latter circumstance, that he was upon wonderfully gracious terms with the Three Tuns widow, made it a point of the first importance that I should ascertain if he was paying his addresses to Miss Osborne;—playing a bold but very hazardous game for double stakes—beauty as well as money! The amount of money he would obtain by marriage with Mrs. Blake would, we had ascertained, be considerable. She had over one thousand pounds invested in consols in her own name, and the personals she took under the will were sworn to be under three thousand pounds; so outrageously had she imposed upon her drink-demented husband in respect of his circumstances.

Of the will more presently. I must first, regrasping the direct thread of the story, state that I was entirely successful with Mrs. Sims, a good, gossiping old soul who needed no urging to tell me all she knew—adding some imaginary touches of her own—respecting "dear Fanny Osborne." Mrs. Sims was perfectly delighted to hear she was about to obtain three day-boarders; it was an earnest that she would get on, and be able to support her poor mother in comfort, without being compelled by poverty to marry a worthless fellow who had got some hold upon her by means of letters that had passed between them before Miss Osborne had reason to suspect that he was no better than he should be. The man's name was Hamilton; he was a painter-fellow, and seemed to have been in luck of late—a very good-looking man, a handsome rake. And Mrs. Sims was overjoyed to find that her young friend was glad to receive such an accession to the number of her pupils; it was proof that she had definitively made up her mind to depend upon herself, and send the painter packing.

All this and more was spoken in a breath, as it were, without rest or pause; but when the worthy dame did at last stop, I hastily said that I was perfectly satisfied, and wished Mrs. Sims good day.

*Marriage* with Miss Osborne was not Hamilton's game I was quite sure. He meant to *marry* the widow Blake, whose volcanic jealous temper it would be now expedient to bring into play, not, I trusted, without decisive results.

Ferris I should always be able to pitch upon with the help of

Harmer's people. It were well, therefore, that no inquiry should be made after him for the present, forasmuch that a gentleman of his talent and training might, if alarmed into watchfulness, effectually mar the cleverest plot.

Mine was soon decided upon, and I again waited upon Miss Osborne, apologised for the deception I had passed upon her, frankly acknowledged who I was and my motives for waiting upon her, and having first obtained a solemn promise of secrecy, informed her of Hamilton's *liaison* with the widow Blake, his intention to speedily wed her, and finally of the grave suspicions that attached to both with reference to the death of James Blake. Miss Osborne was naturally much agitated by so startling and unexpected a communication, but before long calmed down into acquiescence with my views, and promised, moreover, to aid, as far as possible, in bringing the guilty parties, if guilty they were, to justice. I could not doubt that womanly resentment of Hamilton's treachery and vile design towards herself went far in inducing her to give that promise. Her pride was deeply wounded; but if she had ever really loved the man, that feeling, I was sure, had completely died out; and grieved, shocked as she was at discovering with how base a scoundrel she had been on terms of confidential intercourse, a feeling of relief, of thankfulness, was uppermost in her mind that she should be quit of his importunity, and, above all, that the discovery had not come too late.

When I arrived home, a few hours after leaving Miss Osborne, I found an inclosure containing a copy of James Blake's will, which had been obtained at my request, the attesting signatures to which were, I found, Charles Hamilton and John Norton Ferris. Fresh matter for surmise to feed upon!

The next day but one, and about three o'clock, I was in a back apartment on the ground floor at No. 47, High Street, Camden Town; and after ascertaining that I could snugly ensconce myself within the shell of a lofty press, from which a carpenter had just before removed the bedstead, &c., I again earnestly impressed upon Miss Osborne, whose courage I feared was fast oozing away, the instructions I had previously given, and, above all, that she herself was to bolt out of the room the



moment Mrs. Blake bounced in. This she again promised to do, and having, at my pressing instance, taken a couple of glasses of wine, her fainting spirits rallied visibly.

Previously to this, anonymous letters had been addressed to Mrs. Blake, warning her that she was the laughing-stock and dupe of Hamilton, as others had been before her; that her pretended suitor was in reality courting a Miss Fanny Osborne, of 47, High Street, Camden Town; and that he had frequently told a friend of the writer's that he only delayed his marriage with Miss Osborne till he should have wheedled Mother Blake out of more of her money. Finally, it had been arranged that Mrs. Blake should have auricular proof of Hamilton's coarse infidelity if she would call at No. 47, High Street, Camden Town, at four precisely in the afternoon. Miss Osborne's servant-girl, who had been bribed by the writer, herself one of Hamilton's victims, would admit her quietly, and the truth would be known.

Miss Osborne had appointed an interview with Hamilton for a quarter to four, her musical engagements being a capital excuse for particular hours and punctuality; and there was no doubt that he would arrive to the minute, or nearly so. Miss Osborne, I may remark, looked charmingly, the emotion caused by the novel and exciting circumstances in which she was placed having completely banished the hard, sceptical look (product, no doubt, of too early a knowledge of the hard, sceptical world) from her clear brown eyes. I am very partial to brown eyes: they are not so highly charged with electricity as black, nor so demurely die away as blue eyes; but, for all that, honest, fine-tempered, clear brown eyes for me. This by the way.

Well, the hands of my watch, unmoved by its owner's impatience, slowly progressed till they marked a quarter to four—ten minutes to four—and I was beginning to fear that our plot had fallen through, when *rat-tat-tat*—our man was come! I crept forthwith into the disembowelled press, and presently Mr. Hamilton hurried into the room with lover eagerness; receiving, to his surprise, a coldly formal reception from the young lady by whose invitation he was there.

I was sure the widow would be outside watching for the

traitor's arrival, and was not therefore surprised, though it was not four o'clock, to hear the agreed single knock at the street door; nor, knowing the lady, that it almost shook the house, so fiercely was it struck.

The apartment, I should state, in which Miss Osborne received her suitor was divided from the front parlour by a very thin panelled partition; and though I could not, situated as I was, hear the servant usher Mrs. Blake into the said front apartment—both on tiptoe as she was instructed—I was perfectly sure the widow would hear every word that passed between Miss Osborne and Hamilton, and that the explosion, consequently, was imminent.

I have said that Mr. Hamilton's reception by the young lady was coldly formal. He asked the meaning of the frontlet of scorn or anger upon her brow, and was told with pretty pout—at least, that was how it should have been done, but of course I could not see if the lady acted her part cleverly—that she, Miss Osborne, had heard that he was paying his addresses to a wealthy widow, the landlady of a low public-house.

“Faugh! Mother Blake, you mean,” interrupted Hamilton. “A blowsy-frowsy, musty widow, who, but *for* her money——”

He got no farther. The widow threw wide the door, rushed in, and sprang at him like a wild cat, Miss Osborne as instantly making her escape.

“Wretch—scoundrel—traitor!” screamed the widow, as she tore the face and tugged at the hair of the astounded man. “You—you diabolical villain! I'll have you hanged—hanged—hanged! You murdered Blake, you know you did—you perjured wretch—you assassin——”

Recovering from the stupefaction into which he was thrown by the suddenness of the assault, Hamilton shook the woman fiercely off, and flung her with some violence against my hiding-place.

“Bl—t you!” said he in deadly but suppressed tones: “bl—t you! What do you mean? Are you mad?”

“Murderer!” retorted the virago, who was beside herself with jealous rage; “murderer! I'll hang you if law or justice is to be had for money!”

“Money, fool!”—still in the same low hissing tones—

“money, fool! Why you have —— *Will* you hold your cursed tongue, and begone with me?”

“No—no—no! I won’t begone! I denounce you as a murderer, and I’ll hang you, villain—”

“Listen, miserable idiot;” interrupted Hamilton with savage emphasis, but still speaking in the same low, guarded tone, and looking round, I doubted not, to fully assure himself there was no one within hearing; “listen, miserable idiot—”

“I won’t listen. You are a villain, an assassin, a—”

“Bl—t your throat!” exclaimed Hamilton, alarmed, and exasperated beyond endurance. “You have *no* money, fool! The will you claim under is a forgery—do you hear, idiot?—a forgery; and the true one therefore, in favour of Mrs. Arnold, beggars you.”

“You lie—surely you lie,” gasped the woman faintly. The announcement seemed to have in a manner stunned her.

“I have spoken the truth for once. Come, let us begone. Nobody can have heard, or at least understood, anything; and we shall make things right yet. We will talk matters quietly over at the Three Tuns. Come at once.”

They went off together, and soon afterwards I, having first spoken with Miss Osborne, left the house.

I had been upon the point of darting from my hiding-place, and arresting Hamilton upon the charge of forgery, confessed to by himself; but a moment’s reflection checked that impulse. He would, of course, deny that his words had any serious meaning; and where was I to look for confirmatory evidence? I knew not. Then, though it was evident Mrs. Blake strongly suspected him of having murdered her husband, it was, it seemed, but suspicion, even should she not, as in all probability she would, retract the accusation. No, no; in such a perplexing, faintly-traced labyrinth it was necessary to walk warily, hazard no false step, or the desired end would be almost certainly missed.

There was no occasion either for hot speed. We could always find Hamilton, and I resolved to suspend action in the matter till the superior powers had been consulted. This was done on the following day, and the upshot was that two officers were dispatched to arrest Hamilton, whilst I waited upon John

Norton Ferris, whose address I had no difficulty in obtaining.

Ferris was comfortably enjoying a pipe when I, unannounced, walked into the front apartment of the floor which he occupied at No. 11, Gerrard Street, Soho.

He knew me, I found, by sight and name very well, and could not control an exclamation of alarm as he dropped his pipe and asked with quivering lips "what Mr. Waters wanted with him."

"I want you for *forgery*—the forgery, in conjunction with Charles Hamilton, of one James Blake's will. Your confederate has confessed to that charge. You are also both accused of having murdered the said James Blake by drowning him at the Isle of Wight."

Ferris did not answer a word—could not—his glaring eyes remained fixed upon mine, his ashen lips trembled, twitched, but no sound escaped them, and he presently dropped down on the floor, swooning with fear.

Cold water revived him, and we talked together; the result of which dialogue was, that he volunteered a full confession, in the hope of being admitted evidence for the Crown, though I warned him that what he said might be used against him. He would risk that, he said, and, if possible, be beforehand with Hamilton. This was just what was wanted. In fact, there was no other chance of obtaining a conviction; and there could not be much doubt that Hamilton was the chief criminal. Should it prove otherwise no promise had been made to Ferris, and he could be placed in the dock to answer for his deeds, notwithstanding his volunteered confession.

With much circumlocution he in substance stated that there had been a criminal intrigue going on between Hamilton and Mrs. Blake for many months before Blake left London for the Isle of Wight, induced to do so by the lying pretext palmed off upon him with consummate cunning by the adulteress. The first intention was to turn everything into money and leave the country whilst Blake was away. That intention was abandoned, and the expediency of getting the unfortunate husband into a lunatic asylum was frequently discussed. The affair became pressing, for Blake's last letters showed that he was awaking, as it were, to a consciousness that he was being humbugged,

befooled, robbed ! Hamilton and Ferris, therefore, left London for the Isle of Wight with only one strictly defined and determined purpose—that of preventing Blake from returning to the Three Tuns as master, or, in fact, returning at all.

They were several days in Cowes before they ventured to communicate with him ; but at last Ferris met him late one evening, and induced the drunken fool to accompany him, as he pretended, to his lodgings, where they could be jolly till morning. They did not enter any house, but strolled and staggered along the beach, where they met Hamilton, Ferris continuing to ply the doomed man with liquor to prevent him from going away. Finally Blake sank down on the beach near Egypt dead drunk. It was a fine summer night, the tide was at the full, and Ferris noticed Hamilton go to a rising ground, and look carefully in all directions, to ascertain if any one was near or in sight.

Not a soul was to be seen, not a sound heard save the breaking of the waves upon the pebbly beach ; and Hamilton, greatly to Ferris's horror and surprise, if Ferris was to be believed, stepped quietly towards Blake, seized hold of him by the legs, and exclaiming, " Help me, Ferris—this is the surest way of settling the matter," began dragging the still unconscious victim towards the water. Ferris solemnly declared that he did not himself actually aid in the perpetration of the diabolical deed. Be that as it might, it was soon and effectually accomplished. The helpless man was thrust under the water, and held forcibly down till life was extinct. Senselessly drunk as Blake was, his struggles, Ferris remarked with a shudder, were fearful. The body was next stripped, the dead man's papers were secured, and the clothes placed out to dry as I had conjectured.

The assassins then stole home by different paths to their respective lodgings. One of their precautions had been to lodge apart, and very seldom be seen together, and then as if by accident, and as complete strangers to each other. This was no doubt one reason why Mrs. Barnes's statement, that she had seen two strangers with the deceased on the evening previous to the day when the body was found, did not direct suspicion towards them.

They left the Isle of Wight two days after the murder. Arrived at the Three Tuns, Mrs. Blake was coolly informed by

them that her husband had been accidentally and most fortunately drowned whilst bathing, and though Ferris had no doubt that she suspected the truth, yet, morally implicated as she was, she dared not probe the matter home, even had she been willing to do so. It was at the same time announced that a will of the deceased's, drawn up by Ferris, and left in his possession, had been duly executed just before Blake left London, by which document the deviser left all that he might die possessed of to Mary, his wife. This monstrous fiction the widow also affected to believe, and probate was in due course obtained upon the instrument. The secret game of the confederates was a cleverly-contrived, audacious one. Could Hamilton have induced Miss Osborne, to whom he was madly attached, to marry him, he would have boldly insisted upon the division of the property between himself, Ferris, and the widow herself, and doubted not of being able to terrify her into compliance. One strong proof of the absolute mastery which the two men had obtained over her was that she dared not refuse them a *loan* of five hundred pounds, which they demanded the day after their return to London. Nothing but the all-mastering fury of a jealous woman, scorned, could have broken through, even for a moment, the strong fetters in which Hamilton had bound her. It was Ferris, by the bye, who, having observed my frequent appearance at the Three Tuns, told her who I was—a notification which, as the reader is already aware, greatly increased her nervous terrors. It was also a hint to the much guiltier confederates to make themselves scarce for a time, which they took care to do; and even after they heard from Mrs. Blake that the suspicions caused by the proceedings before the inquest, and the suggestions of the sister-in-law, were set at rest, it was not without considerable misgiving that their visits to the Three Tuns were resumed.

Ferris was safely lodged in Newgate, but the officers sent to arrest Hamilton sadly blundered over the business. After being apprised of the charge against him, he was allowed to retire into an adjoining room to change his dress, from which room he contrived to slip down into the street and escape. The pursuit was, however, so hot and unrelenting that, finding it impossible to leave the country—being, moreover, reduced to

utter destitution—the wretched felon committed suicide about a month after his escape. He was found, hanging from a tree in Hainault Forest, quite dead : verdict, "Felo-de-se."

Ferris, who had formally been admitted evidence for the Crown, was of course set at liberty. He left immediately for America.

The forged will was set aside, and the validity of that by which the sister-in-law inherited James Blake's property established. It was, however, found impossible to deprive the widow of the thousand pounds odd consols standing in her name. Still, and though she might and did defy legal prosecution for any share she might have had in the crimes by which she was content to profit, the widow Blake found it necessary to forthwith leave the Three Tuns ; and this notwithstanding that, with cunning forethought, she had obtained a renewal of the lease in the name, of course, of Mary Blake, though the former one had not quite lapsed, under the pretence of wishing to make some expensive alterations urgently required, which she could not in reason be expected to undertake, except under the security of a lease with a long term to run.

It was about four years before I heard of her again, and then by a curious chance. I was on a professional visit to Bristol, when, passing along one of the most crowded streets of that city, I noticed the name of Barton Brice on the sign of a large inn. Barton Brice ! Surely, thought I, that must be my old acquaintance, who disappeared so suddenly a few weeks after the termination of the Blake business. I would ascertain, and accordingly I pushed my way to a large back parlour, the house being crowded with company. Perhaps the occasion was an extraordinary one.

Seated at last, I called lustily for a glass of brandy-and-water, to which order a man in his shirt-sleeves, and working like a horse to serve the customers, kept replying, "Yes, sir—coming, sir—directly, sir." At last he brought me the required brandy-and-water, and setting it down on the table without directly looking at me said mechanically, as he wiped his sweating forehead with the back of his hand, "One shilling, if you please."

"Good heavens !" I exclaimed, "Brice, is that you ?"

“Eh?—eh?—what?” ejaculated Brice. “Why, God bless me! you are Mr. Waters.”

“Brice!—where’s Brice?” resounded from the inner bar. “Where’s the man got to?”

“Coming—coming,” responded Brice. “Presently—presently,” he added *sotto voce*, and with a weak wink to me.

He was soon back, and whilst pretending to sedulously wipe the table, said in a low, nervous voice, “Glad to see you, very. You knew the voice, of course. Remarkable one. Mrs. Blake that was, you know. Coming! At nine to-night at the Grapes, Wine Street, for half an hour, precisely. Coming!” I nodded; he was off like a shot, and was presently darting about here and there in a profuse perspiration with grog, ale, pipes, &c., receiving money for the same, which he immediately carried to the inner bar, and without pause emerging again into the crowded parlour, loaded with full glasses, pots, &c. Poor devil! *Ci-devant* Mrs. Blake was taking it out of him with a vengeance.

I was exact to time at the Grapes, and was presently joined by poor Barton Brice. Poor, do I say? That is incorrect; for he was handsomely dressed, wore a splendid gold watch and massive chain, and before he had been with me ten minutes said he was a seven thousand pounds man.

“Yes, seven thousand at the least. O Lord!”

“It seems like a dream to me that you should have married the widow Blake.”

“A dream, does it? I only wish—This was how it was, Waters. I was completely out of luck, both pockets to let, grub scarce, and the fluids not come-at-able anyhow. Mrs. B. was taking a public-house where she thought my vocal powers would be of great value. Wonderful woman of business—wonderful! Keen as the north star. O Lord! Well, what could I do but shut my eyes and open my mouth, and see what God or the devil would send me? Just so; and the business *did* flourish, and no flies. She—that is, of course, we—came out a thousand pounds better than we went in. Tremendous, wasn’t it?”

“She—that is we—next took the house you were in to-day. Wonderful business! Yes, I am already a seven thousand



pounds man at least. O dear ! I have just ten minutes more," added Brice nervously, and looking at his splendid watch. "Just ten minutes."

"Mrs. Brice enjoys her usual fine health ? "

"Doesn't she—that's all ! Why, God bless you, nothing would kill her but a cannon-ball ! I must be off. Good bye."

"Stay a moment, old friend. I comprehend what you could say well enough. Remember, on the other hand, that you are now a rich man. Mrs. Brice is considerably older than you. In the course of nature you will survive her, and then you will be able to marry more to your liking."

"No, Mr. Waters ! " responded Brice, with great solemnity. "Never that ceremony for me again—never again. Never ! No, by G—, not with an angel. Never ! Good bye."



## CHAPTER XXI.

## FIRE-RAISING.

WITH the exceptions, if they are exceptions, of Kent and Lincolnshire, I do not believe that agricultural labourers are in any part of England better, if so well, off as in Essex, especially in the marsh districts, and the land through which runs the road to Ilford, Romford, and Brentwood. At the time I am now writing (the close of July, 1859), men are getting twenty, twenty-five, thirty shillings per acre for reaping the corn, which has, it is true, been much laid by the recent thunder and rain storms. Labourers employed the year round cannot be obtained for less than fifteen shillings per week. A stocky, hardy race are those East Angles, ignorant in bookish lore as the clods they break, but skilled husbandmen, and, with but slight training, terrible soldiers—rough, stubborn devils, who, to quote General Foy, “with a dogged obstinacy peculiar to their nation refuse to be beaten.” We have there some half-dozen pensioned invalids wearing tartan caps, and all Essex men, who belong, or did belong, to the famous 42nd Scotch regiment. Should it ever, in a word, become a national necessity to chaw up those redoubtable Zouaves, the Essex calves are just the animals to do it, and that, too, without making, in a general way, more than one bite at one cherry. The liveliest gesticulation, the most “incomparable dash,” the fiercest shouts of “Vive l’Empereur, vive la France, vive le diable,” would, I am quite sure, make no more impression upon our stolid Essex numskulls than water poured upon a duck’s back, if so much, which I doubt.

But what has all this to do with a police-officer’s story of arson, or fire-raising, the reader may ask? I answer that indirectly it has much to do with it. The story I am about to

relate could not have occurred amongst the loyal, contented Essex peasantry of the present day ; and whilst glancing back at its main incidents, preparatory to putting them down, the contrast between now and something more than a quarter of a century since, when incendiary fires were of such frequent occurrence that fire offices declined to assure agricultural produce, except under special policies and at exorbitant rates, could not fail to forcibly impress itself upon one's mind, and impart, moreover, peculiar and instructive significance to one act especially of the drama I am about to briefly sketch.

The large limits which now mark the field of action allotted to the metropolitan police were vastly more contracted at the time I am writing of than at the present day. No part of agricultural Essex, for example, was within the radius subject to the jurisdiction of Scotland Yard. The nightly incendiary fires there, occurring out of our *beat*, were consequently left to be dealt with by the local constabulary, except in extraordinary cases, when two or three of our sharpest hands would, generally at the request of the county magistrates, be dispatched to make inquiries upon the spot. It was always a thankless, and, in nine instances out of ten, an unsuccessful service. Something of the same sympathy with the evil-doers, who warred against "property," was manifested by the labouring classes as obtains in some parts of Ireland to the present day.

The officers remarked that there was one very striking exception to the bitter hostility evinced by the discontented labourers towards the farmers. The sourest churl amongst them spoke with respect and good-will of John Marett, a plain-sailing, straightforward yeoman, cultivating about a hide of land (one hundred acres), who, by dint of clever farming and untiring industry, had, in a comparative sense, made himself a rich man. He was a liberal master, having discovered, long before Mr. Mechi, that he *could not afford* to pay low wages. As a matter of course, therefore, he had the pick of the agricultural labour market ; and as, in addition to well-calculated liberality in the matter of wages, he was of a genial temper and of a charitable disposition, checked only by a generous prudence, one cannot wonder at his popularity amongst the rustic folks, or that, whilst incendiary fires were reddening the sky in the dark winter nights for miles

around, Lea Farm remained in perfect security, as if environed by a magic circle which the Fire Demon had no power to break through. I may mention that John Marett was of gentle birth, and had received a good education. A maternal uncle of his, Lieutenant Curtis, was killed in Lord Howe's 1st of June victory, and he himself had passed for a lieutenancy in the royal navy just before the peace of 1815, which flung him, as it did thousands of others, upon the bleak wastes of life, to take root or not as the fates might determine. Marett flourished, having been so fortunate as to marry a still young maiden, though old acquaintance of his, and possessed of genial temper, industrious habits, and over two thousand pounds in cash. Anne James was the daughter of a thriving agriculturist of Norfolk, and thoroughly skilled in domestic farm management. John Marett himself had a natural turn, as it is called, for agricultural pursuits. The lease of Lea Farm, Essex, happened to be in the market; the young couple ventured to purchase it, though the period (1816) was a gloomy one in English agricultural annals, and complete success crowned their exertions. The wife had been dead some years; two daughters were married and settled, one in Norfolk, the other in Yorkshire; so that John Marett, his only surviving son, Edward, a high-spirited young fellow nearly of age, and one Dennis M'Grath, a somewhat younger man, comprised the family circle at Lea Farm.

Dennis M'Grath was an adopted son. An Irishwoman, more gently nurtured, as it seemed, than the mass of haymakers and pea-pickers with whom she came over from Ireland, was unexpectedly confined under a shed, beneath which, then as now, itinerant Irish helpers lie huddled together during the short summer nights. She was conveyed into the house, and kindly attended to, but died almost suddenly within a week of her son's birth. The poor creature manifested the liveliest gratitude, and, but for her swift and unexpected taking off, would no doubt have given Mrs. Marett the address of some relative or friend in Ireland. As it was, all that was known, or could, after strict inquiry, be ascertained, was that her name was Mary M'Grath, that she had embarked for Bristol at Cork just as the vessel was about to sail, that no one was observed to take leave of her. Meanwhile, the child, a lively

little fellow, had so ingratiated himself with the Maretts that it was finally resolved to adopt him into the family. This rather eccentric purpose was heartily carried out. Dennis received as good an education as their own son, and, as he grew to manhood, was as carefully initiated in the business of farming, the only difference in their mode of life being—and this more owing to the Irish youth's good sense than to any suggestion of Mr. Maretts—that, whilst Edward Maretts rode occasionally after the hounds, and otherwise indulged, almost *ad libitum*, in various amusements and sprees incident to country youths who have healthy blood in their veins and money in both pockets, Master Dennis, as he was usually called by the farm people, was always at home, diligent in business, and indefatigable in promoting his benefactor's interest in every possible way.

All this I became acquainted with during a long conversation I had with Mr. Maretts in March of the winter when the incendiary fires were of such frequent occurrence. I had been sent into that part of Essex to make inquiry respecting a burglary that had been committed at no very great distance from Lea Farm; and, being informed that Mr. Maretts had himself seen two suspicious-looking fellows lurking about the neighbourhood just previous to the burglary, I waited upon him to inform myself of such particular facts anent the said strangers as he might be able to communicate. That particular inquiry, though it led to nothing *per se*, introduced me to a very genial-tempered gentleman, in the best acceptation of that noble designation. It might be that I was especially favoured, he, Mr. Maretts, having by a cursory remark of mine discovered that I was a native of the part of Yorkshire where his youngest daughter, Ellen, had settled on her marriage, and could gossip with him concerning the antecedents and actual condition of most of her neighbours.

I stayed to dine, and had thereby the opportunity of making the acquaintance of Edward Maretts and Dennis M'Grath. They were well-grown youths—Edward Maretts the tallest and handsomest; M'Grath, whose Milesian parentage was strongly stamped upon his bright, vivacious face, the most intelligent. He seemed to have better profited than the other by the education he had received. There was a dash of *rakeism* in Edward

Marett's speech and manner that did not agreeably impress me. It might, however, be nothing more, I reflected, than an indication of exuberant animal spirits.

A brisker demand for labour and a cheaper loaf were infinitely more effective in putting down incendiarism than all the efforts of the magistracy and police. Before a twelvemonth had elapsed since my visit to Lea Farm, fires, other than accidental ones, were things of the past.

Meanwhile, Edward Marett became of age, and in a money sense had married exceedingly well. His wife, some five or six years his senior, was plain in person and crabbed in temper, but had brought her husband sufficient capital to purchase the lease and stock of a large farm immediately adjoining his father's. Very soon afterwards Marett senior, who had long before purchased the freehold of Lea Farm, retired from business, but with the natural reluctance incident to age, declined to quit a home hallowed by sweet and mournful memories, and stipulated to keep certain apartments in the old farm-house for his own use. As he continued to be seen about the place pretty much as ever, giving directions as formerly, the fact that he had given the lease to his son, and had no longer any direct personal interest in the prosperity of Lea Farm, was known only to his family and his lawyer. This was the more emphatically the case, forasmuch that Mr. Marett manifested, after the bargain with his son was completed, a whimsical repugnance to its being known that he was no longer master at Lea Farm.

This state of things premised, and Edward Marett himself being almost as popular with the peasantry as his father, the country side was thrown into a state of marvelling perplexity when, in the nights of November and December following Edward Marett's marriage, four fires, indisputably the work of an incendiary or of incendiaries, burst forth in quick succession at the farms cultivated by the Marett's, consuming produce to the value of several thousand pounds. The labourers, some of whom had worked for Mr. Marett from the time he rented Lea Farm, were savagely indignant that their master should have his property destroyed by malicious villains, when fire-raising was no longer heard of in the county. It was altogether incom-

prehensible ; not the faintest clue to the felon or felons could be so much as guessed at. A disastrous feature in the case was that, relying upon former impunity, the farm produce had not been insured, and that, after such a succession of calamities, the offices declined to grant policies upon any terms.

A formal application having been made at Scotland Yard for the assistance of an officer to conduct a searching inquiry upon the spot, accompanied by a letter from Marett himself, stating that he should be glad if the said officer were Mr. Waters, I was accordingly directed to proceed to Lea Farm, where I arrived on a gloomy evening in the beginning of January by the Romford coach and Mr. Marett's gig, through a blinding snow storm, which set in soon after the coach left London. I found the two Marett, Mrs. Marett, and Dennis M'Grath in a state of extreme nervous excitement. An attempt at firing two valuable wheat-ricks had been made the previous night. Fortunately Marett junior and M'Grath were returning from Romford Market, and the latter fancying he smelt smoke as they drove past the said ricks, the chaise was stopped, and the young men hastened to ascertain if the said smoke was a fact or a fancy. A fact ! A few minutes more, and the ricks would have been ablaze ! As it happened, the smouldering fire was extinguished, and diligent search was made to discover by what means combustion had been brought about. The night was a bright, frosty one, and from that part of the farm the surrounding country was commanded to a great extent ; yet neither man, woman, nor child could be seen. More, much more than that. There had been a fall of snow about two hours previously, and the white mantle which covered the ground had no print of human foot. This staggering fact had been first remarked upon by Edward Marett, before the young man had left the gig, as a proof that M'Grath's suspicion that he smelt smoke must be unfounded. It was clear, therefore, that fire must have been applied to the stacks at least two hours before it was discovered. This was the most perplexing part of the affair, and seemed to promise an absolute impunity to the fire-raisers. How detect an incendiary who could lay a train that would be hours before bursting into flame ? A difficult question to solve. We continued to talk of little else during the evening, and,

indeed, till far into the night, when the younger Marett and his wife retired. Dennis M'Grath followed them, and handed me a lighted chamber-candle, which invitation I, upon a significant gesture from Marett senior, declined. I and Mr. Marett would have another glass together. M'Grath said he should like to keep us company, but, feeling unusually tired and sleepy, wished us good night.

"I have a matter for your private ear, Waters," said Mr. Marett; "at all events, we must, I think, drop no hint for the present of a suspicion which has taken a firm hold of my mind. You will, however, best know whether secret watchfulness or open accusation will be the best mode of action. We are all agreed," he continued, "that these fires are the work of some person or persons to whom some of us must have given mortal offence, and who thus seek to avenge real or fancied injuries. Now, I feel persuaded that I myself have not a personal enemy in the world; therefore, after much pondering over the matter, I have arrived at a firm conviction that my son is aimed at, from which postulates it follows that the fire-raiser knows that the produce of this farm belongs to him, not to me."

"And that knowledge you say is confined to a London lawyer, your own family, and—and Dennis M'Grath?"

"No; there is another person who I am assured is aware that everything at Lea Farm, except the soil, is the property of my son. His name is John Ingram. He has worked on the farm since he was a child, and though a wildish young fellow, and of late much addicted to drink, has always maintained a good character for honesty. He is a first-rate ploughman, and a capital hand with horses. Once, at some personal risk to himself, he perhaps saved my life by springing at the head, and checking a vicious brute that had bolted with me. He has the best wages of any labourer on the farm, and a capital cottage to live in rent free; and yet I am morally sure that John Ingram is the incendiary."

"Upon what facts may that moral certitude be founded?"

"To relate them is to lay bare a family incident of a very painful nature. It must, however, be done, or there will be no clue to guide you, and the frightful ruin going on *must* be arrested.

"If," continued Mr. Marett, "if you had been only slightly



acquainted with this neighbourhood, you could not have failed to hear of Helen Champfort. Whether that fine name really belonged to her is doubtful, but there could be none that she was a remarkably pretty, interesting girl. Helen was about eight years old when she came amongst us. Her aunt, Mrs. Davis, a woman of an austere, reserved temper, who once, I believe, kept a dame-school at Romford, brought her here, giving out that she was an orphan. From what was subsequently gleaned from the girl's imperfect recollection and other sources, we learned that her mother, who lived a long way off, being taken seriously ill, sent for her sister-in-law, Mrs. Davis, and confided Helen to her care, at the same time presenting her with a considerable sum of money, saved out of a pension which terminated with the mother's life. Mrs. Champfort, if that was her name, died; and Mrs. Davis brought away the child. The money proved a curse to the aunt, who gave way to drink, and before a twelvemonth had passed died the drunkard's death. Her niece was, in consequence, cast helpless upon the world. My wife took compassion upon the unfortunate child, and employed her in such light dairy work as she was equal to. She remained with us till about a twelvemonth ago, and was a smart, diligent, neat-handed, trusty, and trustworthy servant. We became very anxious about her as she grew to young womanhood. Our fears were caused by her remarkable beauty, a dangerous and generally fatal gift to the daughters of toil, and especially to girls engaged in rustic toil; for I need not tell *you*, Mr. Waters, that a village maiden with no portion but a pretty face has much less chance of an eligible marriage than a town lass similarly circumstanced. Arcadian innocence, moreover, if fled, as they say it has, from cities, has certainly not settled in our agricultural districts. Helen's was a soft, dove-eyed, beseeching loveliness; and she was timid as a fawn. "Ah!" continued Mr. Marett, with sudden heat, and striking the table with his clenched fist, "had I but known or suspected what has since come to my knowledge, I would have seen Edward in his coffin before consenting to his marriage with his present wife, had she possessed five times five thousand pounds. A curse follows, and will, I fear, continue to follow him. How can it be otherwise whilst a just God reigns on earth?"

"My temper," resumed the fine-hearted old gentleman, after a pause of emotion, "my temper has been soured of late. These crosses and losses irritate and vex me, envenomed, embittered, as they are by sharp regrets for moral fallings off, to which, I fear, a too lax family discipline on my part has contributed. This, however, is somewhat wide of my purpose in making a confidant of you. I was remarking upon the sweet, placid beauty of Helen Champfort, and the gentle submissiveness of her disposition. Poor girl! her virtues were sanctified and holy traitors to her; and I, blind mole that I must have been, saw not her danger till all too late to shield her from it."

"Helen had, of course, many secret admirers amongst our youthful rustics, but scarcely one open, avowed one. Her natural refinement constituted an invisible fence, as one may say, against their clownish approaches. Dennis M'Grath was evidently smitten. Spite of a desperate struggle with himself, to which I was *not* blind, to shake off her influence—a struggle prompted by a restless anxiety on his part to get on in the world, which the incumbrance of a portionless girl-wife would not aid him to do—he finally succumbed, and with my full consent proposed marriage to her. Her answer was a burst of hysterical weeping and incoherent exclamations of distress, to which no precise meaning could be attached. Restored to comparative calm, Helen gratefully, but decidedly refused to be his wife. The poor fellow's distress of mind at perceiving, as he at once did, that the girl's refusal to marry him was unalterable, called forth a fresh burst of tears from Helen, and so affected her that she was carried sobbing and fainting to bed, which she did not leave for several days. I could not comprehend her refusal. She certainly had no right to count upon a better, if so good a match, in a social sense. I had promised to help him to a small farm, and I sent word by Mrs. Jennings, our housekeeper, that I wished to reason with her. The answer sent me back was an earnest supplication that I would not speak to her upon the subject. She could not bear it, and implored me, by her gratitude for the countless kindnesses she had experienced at my hands and those of her dead sainted mistress—it was thus the girl expressed herself—never to mention marriage to her.

“‘As to the wench’s weeping and hysterics,’ added Jennings, a stern-tempered, but in the main kind-hearted soul; ‘as to the wench’s weeping and hysterics, there’s a good cause for them, or I am preciousely mistaken.’

“I sharply rebuked Jennings for presuming to apply such a term as ‘wench’ to Helen Champfort, and she flung away in a huff. I attached no definite meaning at the time either to her words or the shrugged shoulders and disdainful toss of the head with which she received my tart reproof. I should as soon have doubted the purity of my own daughters as Helen’s.

“I still cherished a hope that the capricious girl, as I thought her, would reconsider M’Grath’s offer, when I was almost literally knocked over by Mrs. Jennings’ abrupt announcement that John Ingram had at last settled to marry Helen Champfort!

“‘John Ingram!’ I exclaimed, scarcely believing I had heard aright. ‘What does the insolent clown mean? *He* marry Helen Champfort! The fellow must be mad to dream of such a thing.’

“‘That is just my opinion,’ retorted Jennings; ‘but I suppose be can’t well do otherwise as things are. It’s a pity they were not married months ago. There now,’ she added, ‘it’s of no use flying into a rage with me. You and all of us have been grossly deceived by the artful minx. I told you before that I pretty well guessed the meaning of all that weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.’

“Well, Mr. Waters, the first blow over—it was a bitter one, for I had come to regard Helen Champfort with strong affection—there was, I felt, nothing for it but to consent to the marriage. I could get no speech of the girl herself, by the way. Shame—the impossibility, I judged, of looking me in the face—kept her shut up in her bedroom, to which, by earnest, humble messages and appeals to my wife’s tenderness towards her, she effectually barred my entrance. My son seemed—d—n his seeming!—my son, I say, seemed greatly distressed (he was courting his present wife); and as to Dennis M’Grath, *he* was for many days fairly beside himself with pity, indignation, rage.”

“Had no one observed any previous intimacy between Helen Champfort and John Ingram?”

"No one had observed the slightest *intimacy* between them ; but I myself remembered to have seen Ingram, who was a smartish young fellow, walking sheepishly beside her, though some two or three yards off, from church, as if he wished, but had not courage, to accost her. I will dwell no longer upon this part of the miserable affair," continued Mr. Marett. "Helen became John Ingram's wife. The wedding was a strictly private one, of course. The poor girl, assisted out of the chaise-cart in which she was conveyed to church, tottered, pale as a ghost, and crying piteously, towards the altar, like one going to execution ; and the ceremony finished, swooned away. All this I was told, for I myself have not seen her since the day Mrs. Jennings stunned me with the news of her approaching marriage with Ingram. She has sedulously avoided me, and I felt no wish to thrust my accusing presence upon her, poor thing !"

"A sad affair, no doubt," I remarked ; "but I do not at all perceive how it will help us to discover who has fired your son's wheat-stacks."

"I will show you how, and in as few words as possible. I discovered not very many days ago—no matter by what means—that my son—a scoundrel, though he is my son—is the father of Helen's child ; that he first terrified her into silence as regarded himself, and next into marriage with John Ingram, working chiefly upon her loving gratitude to me. To Ingram, for his share in the odious business, he gave a considerable sum of money.

"The marriage, I need hardly say, has been a wretched one. The money at the wittol husband's disposal, and an irritating sense of humiliation, which the dullest clod could not but feel in such a case, drove him to the public-house. The taunts of his companion sots, most of whom had all along known of, or shrewdly surmised, the how and why of the strangely-assorted marriage, frequently inflamed his drunken fury to downright frenzy, and the cowardly savage vented his rage upon his helpless wife. This came to my son's knowledge, and he fiercely upbraided Ingram for his brutality. At last—and this was about a fortnight before the first fire on our farms—my son, finding remonstrance and threats of no avail, and his naturally hot temper set aflame by some taunting retort of the husband's,

whom he chanced to meet when no one was by, horse-whipped him within, as folk say, an inch of his life. More than once after receiving that severe chastisement—a well-deserved one, though not at Edward's hands—Ingram was heard to say that he would be well revenged upon Edward Marett before either of them was many months older. "I happen, moreover," added Mr. Marett, "I happen, moreover, to know that Helen knew from my son's own lips that he should take possession of this farm upon his marriage with Jane Stokes."

"You were made acquainted with these particulars not many days since. May I ask the name of your informant?"

"That is a secret which I have pledged my word to keep."

"John Ingram has not much chemical knowledge I should suppose; and these long-smouldering fires cannot be set by ordinary means. By the bye, how was it that your informant so long delayed to acquaint you with circumstances which, at all events, *seem* to point directly to Ingram as the probable incendiary?"

"He hesitated to jeopardise a *possibly* innocent man. The mischief having, however, reached such a height, he could conceal his suspicions no longer."

"*He!* A man, then—not Mrs. Ingram? Ah! I forgot you have not seen her since the discovery of her frailty. Well, Mr. Marett, I can promise you that the trail you have indicated shall be closely followed up, whithersoever it may lead."

"No one will accuse me of being of a vindictive temper," said Mr. Marett; "but I will spare neither money nor pains to punish the cowardly villain, not so much, not nearly so much, on account of the fires, as for his cruelty towards his wife."

"If, that is, we can obtain proof of his guilt."

"Of course; and that—Good heavens!"

A glare of fire suddenly flashed into the room, and rushing out, we saw that the two ricks, the attempt to fire which had been detected by the astute vigilance of Dennis McGrath, had simultaneously burst into flame. Mr. Marett hastened back into the house, and called lustily to the inmates to arouse themselves, whilst I ran round the flaming ricks to ascertain if any one was there. Not a soul was to be seen far or near, and there were no footmarks but my own upon the new-fallen snow. Dennis

M'Grath, Edward Marett, his wife, and the house servants soon came hurrying out, dressed in little more than their night-clothes, only to remain dismayed and helpless spectators of the conflagration, which raged with a devouring fierceness that would have baffled the efforts of all the fire-brigades in London. Labourers and labourers' wives were soon up in considerable numbers, and loud and fierce was the sympathy expressed for Mr. Marett, and execration of the felon fire-raisers.

"Where's John Ingram?" exclaimed Mr. Marett. "He was always about the first up at these fires."

"Gone to London with a waggon-load of turnips," said one of the labourers.

"That he is not," promptly rejoined Dennis M'Grath. "I myself directed Headlands to go with the waggon, and saw him off."

"Yes, that's right, Master Dennis," said the man; "but Headlands put his ancle out jumping off the shafts at the bottom, beyond the Chequers, and, as Ingram was there, he went on with the waggon in his stead."

I watched M'Grath closely, though I hardly knew why, whilst this explanation was being given. His countenance darkened as if a thunder-cloud passed over it, and his eyes sparkled with rage. As he turned savagely away he encountered my fixed gaze, coloured scarlet, and hastily muttered, "The stupid sots can never pass a public-house without having a guzzle. I wish the fellow had put out his neck instead of his ancle."

I made a strongly underlined mental memorandum of Mr. M'Grath's angry emotion, excited by so apparently inadequate a cause, as well as of his confused consciousness when his eye met mine.

The fire soon flamed out; the labourers returned to their homes; and I and the rest of the inmates of Lea Farm-house betook ourselves to bed. I was up betimes the next morning, and during breakfast announced, with purposed abruptness, that I was about to pay John Ingram a visit. Dennis M'Grath looked sharply towards me, and a slight glow tinged his pale face. "Ingram," he said, "will hardly be back from London before two o'clock."

"In which case I must defer my visit till about that hour. You, perhaps, Mr. M'Grath, will accompany me?"

The colour of his cheeks heightened visibly; but he readily replied that he would do so with much pleasure if he was likely to be of any service. "I do not like John Ingram," he added, "and never go near his place. Both he and his wife will be startled to see me there; still, if you wish me to go, I can have no objection."

I had no longer the slightest doubt as to who was the informant whose name Mr. Marett had promised not to disclose.

The small and low, but very pretty, cottage inhabited by the Ingrams was a comfortable one, and had been neatly furnished by Mr. Marett. It was screened on three sides, and partly on the fourth, by high, thick hedges, studded with oaks and elms. Only the chimney-top of the cottage could be seen at the distance of four or five hundred yards, except from one part of the high road, by which it was approached by a path across a meadow. I noticed these particulars during a couple of hours' ramble with a gun borrowed of Mr. Marett. Prowling about, as if for sport, would excite no attention or remark.

I was thinking of returning to dinner, which was to be served at one precisely, when I fancied I saw Dennis M'Grath stealing, or rather scrambling, towards the cottage through the thickest and most impassable part of the tangled thicket by which it was environed. Stooping down, and running along as swiftly as such a position permitted, I gained a point whence I should be able to ascertain if it was really Dennis M'Grath I had caught a glimpse of, and if he was about to pay Mrs. Ingram a clandestine visit. Sure enough the figure I had seen was his, and equally sure that he was bound for the back door of the cottage. Nor did it seem that the lone wife would be "startled to see him there," for he lifted the latch without knocking, and went boldly in without exciting any surprise or alarm that I could hear any indication of, though I was scarcely ten paces off. He stayed two or three minutes only, and, on going away, took as much precaution to avoid being seen as in coming there.

I returned to Lea Farm-house in good time for dinner, and found the family in such a state of dislocation, so to speak, that

there were only I and M'Grath to partake of it, and he had no appetite. Excitement of brain paralysed the action of his stomach, and he scarcely ate an ounce of food, though he drank freely of the liquors on the sideboard—a rare thing, I had understood, for him to do. Mr. Marett and his son, he told me, had had a violent quarrel, in the midst of which Mrs. Edward Marett, after listening unseen for some time, burst in upon them, and made confusion worse confounded. The result was that Marett senior was dining alone, or affecting to dine; Edward Marett, ditto; Mrs. Edward Marett, ditto.

“I fancy Mr. Waters can pretty well guess at the cause of this domestic commotion,” remarked M'Grath.

I was saying that I really could not, when Mrs. Jennings came in to say that Mr. Marett would be glad to see me as soon as I had dined.

I immediately left the room, not, however, without reminding M'Grath that he had promised to accompany me to the dwelling of the Ingrams at the hour he had named.

I found Mr. Marett in a state of great perturbation; rocked to and fro, and shaken with the heave and swell of the domestic hurricane he had just passed through. I asked what had occurred to so greatly disturb him. He replied that some angry words had passed between him and his son, which, like a spark falling upon a magazine of gunpowder, had exploded the pent-up wrath which smouldered in his bosom against the seducer, he might add the destroyer, of Helen Champfort.

“And your son, I have little doubt, indignantly denied that he was guilty of such a crime.”

“Not he,” returned Mr. Marett, much to my surprise; “not he! How could he? He acknowledged the truth of every circumstance which I imparted to you last night. My informant had invented nothing—exaggerated nothing.”

“The deuce! Then I am strangely at fault.”

“Admitted,” continued Mr. Marett, “the truth of the accusation I hurled at him in every particular—with bitter remorse and self-reproach admitted it—adding, with a burst of passion, that, had he his time over again, he would sooner have wedded Helen Champfort without a gown to her back, or a shoe to her foot, than his actual wife with ten thousand pounds. He had



scarcely uttered those words—which, after all, were, I dare say, mere angry extravagance—when in bounced his wife, and you may imagine what a devil's tornado was let loose upon us. Let that pass; our domestic broils will scarcely interest or instruct you. That which I wish to impress upon you is the urgent necessity of transporting—in some way sundering the hateful tie which binds Helen to that hateful scoundrel, John Ingram. Edward related to me instances of his brutality towards her which made my old blood boil in my veins, and completely extinguished—at least, I at present believe so—any feeling of lingering regard which I have felt for him as one who had rendered me a great personal service.”

“Brutality to wives, short of manslaughter,” I remarked, “is not punishable by transportation.”

“True, true, no doubt; but that it is he who has fired our ricks I am as sure as that this right hand is mine.”

“If proof that John Ingram is the incendiary can be obtained, there is little doubt that he will be sent across the seas for life.”

“That proof will be obtained. You will obtain it, Mr. Waters; I am certain you will. Freed from the brutal villain, Helen shall find her own home again—be again my child. I have for years felt towards her as one, and so did a saint now in heaven. We will remove from here,” added the strongly excited gentleman; “take a place near Ellen's, in Yorkshire; and the hateful past will gradually come to be regarded by her as an evil dream.”

It would have been as useless as irritating to argue with Mr. Marett. Ingram's guilt was, with him, a foregone conclusion, honestly entertained, no doubt, and strengthened, unconsciously to himself, by his passionate anxiety to rescue Helen Champfort, as he would persist in calling her, from the odious thralldom into which she had been betrayed and coerced by his own son. I left him with a renewed assurance that I would spare no effort to bring the guilty party or parties to justice.

I was much perplexed. Could it be that this Helen Champfort, for whom Mr. Marett felt such a constraining, parental affection, spite of her fall from virtue—whom Edward Marett, if but in a fit of passionate extravagance, vowed he would prefer,

had he his time over again, to the rich and no doubt highly respectable wife whom he had espoused—was nothing, after all, but a hollow, specious hypocrite, an artful dissembler, trading upon the sympathies of men who saw, in the sad condition to which she had sunk, a punishment out of all proportion to an offence which had at least affection and warm youthful blood for its excuse, utterly inadequate as that excuse might be? It was hard to so judge her; yet how by any charitable hypothesis could the furtive visits of young M'Grath, once a declared lover of hers, during her husband's absence, and certainly without the knowledge of Mr. Marett or his son, be accounted for? And Dennis M'Grath, too, must ostentatiously remark that his appearance at their cottage would be startling to both the dwellers therein! Possibly I might better comprehend the state of matters after seeing Mrs. Ingram and Dennis M'Grath in presence of each other. I would observe them closely, for there was a strong, though undefined, impression on my mind, that the fires on the Marett farms were connected in some way with those clandestine visits to Ingram's cottage.

It was close upon two o'clock, so Dennis M'Grath and I set forth at once. My companion was pre-occupied, taciturn. We walked quickly, and in less than a quarter of an hour M'Grath, in reply to a gruff "Come in," lifted the latch, this time, of the *front* door, and we entered the cottage.

John Ingram was seated, lolling backwards in his chair, with his legs stretched out, and his hands in the pockets of his unbraced breeches. His back was towards us, but swaying himself round upon hearing M'Grath's voice, the sight of his savagely-inflamed countenance showed us that he was in a state of sullen, *stale* intoxication.

"What do *you* want here?" he growled, addressing M'Grath. It was clear that the husband had not often seen the young Irishman at his cottage.

"Nothing," quietly replied M'Grath; "I have merely shown Mr. Waters here the way to your place; *he* wants you, I believe."

"Waters—Waters! What the devil does he want with me?" said the fellow, turning his bloodshot eyes upon me.

"I am a detective police officer. Perhaps you can now guess my errand here."

"D——d if I can," he replied, without showing any sign of emotion except that of stolid, unapprehensive surprise. "Them detectives are clever chaps I've been told," he added moodily, "and have got famous billets. I wish I was one, or anything but a farmer's drudge, and tied up to a ——."

It seemed for a moment, as the vile epithet passed the man's lips, that M'Grath would have sprung at, and felled him to the ground. The young man just checked himself in time, and in a voice quivering with suppressed rage, said, "You foul-mouthed, drunken rascal! give me your memoranda of the deliveries in London, and payments of the manure you have brought back. I wish to be gone."

"Foul-mouthed, drunken rascal, eh? No more a rascal, if so much, than you are, *Squire* Dennis. As to being drunk, I pay for my liquor, and don't do it on the sly."

"Give me the account, will you?"

"Sit down and write it out, then, as I tell it."

"I have told you twenty times before to write down the items yourself in the book I gave you for the purpose. I shall receive no other account. You *can* write, so there is no excuse for not doing it."

"Write! Oh yes! Quite a scollard, ain't I? Well, you've worried me so much about it that I've wrote everything down at last. There's the book on the mantel-shelf. I done it as well as I could. 'Tain't much to brag on, though," he added, relapsing into sullen savagery. "I think I'll go and be a 'soger.'"

That Ingram was annoyed by our visit, or rather that his ill-conditioned state of mind was aggravated by our presence, was obvious enough, and almost equally so, to my mind, that he was not the incendiary I was in quest of. There was no more sign of guilt in his beer-bloated face than in the loutish, devil-may-care stretching of his limbs, and the yawning of his jaws in our faces, as it were. Still he was evidently very anxious to know why Dennis M'Grath, accompanied by a detective police officer, had done him the honour of a visit, much as he endeavoured to show himself carelessly indifferent.

"All right, be it?" he exclaimed, as M'Grath, having seized the little red-covered book, thrust it into his pocket after a

moment's glance at a partially-filled page. "You must be precious 'cute to make out them pothooks by just one squint at 'em."

"I meant," said M'Grath, "that it is right you have at last put your waggon account in writing. I will look at the items by-and-by."

Besides attending to the foregoing dialogue, I had the while looked sharply around. The little parlour had been neatly papered and furnished; but the paper was torn, and soiled with beer or some other liquid dashed against it: a small glass upon the mantel-shelf was smashed; the drawers of a walnut-wood bureau had been forced open by a chisel or like instrument; and there was not an unbroken chair in the room.

"What *do* you want here, Master Detective?" suddenly blurted out Ingram, annoyed by the silent scrutiny with which I regarded him, and the signs everywhere visible that drunkenness, rage, hate, kept house there.

"I wish to ask you a few questions, and it may be that I shall feel it my duty to search your house."

"Ask away—search away!" retorted the fellow. "*Now* then."

"It is known that you have uttered threats against Mr. Edward Marett."

"Bl—t him!" interrupted Ingram, with savage emphasis; "yes, and I will pay him out for old and new whenever I get a chance."

"It is believed that you have already fatally indulged your criminal thirst for revenge, whether for real or fancied wrongs matters not. The fires that have burst forth at Lea and the adjoining farm never occurred when you were absent in London or elsewhere."

"That's a lie!" he interrupted. "Wasn't I in London last night?"

"True; but you did not go forward with the waggon till late. You can, however, perhaps account for the time after you left work, at about five o'clock, till you arrived, out of breath with running, at the Chequers."

"I was here all the time. Ask my precious rib if I wasn't. *Master* Dennis will be sure to believe *her*! I say you," he added, getting up and staggering to an inner door; "come down, will you, and pretty quick!"

A hurried step, in obedience to the coarse mandate, descended the stair, and a pretty, fragile young woman, her sweet face clouded with an inexpressibly touching impress of grief and suffering, came into the room. A rapid look of mutual recognition passed between her and M'Grath—hers timid, furtive; his fiery, *protective*, flashing into rage as he glanced from her wasted form to Ingram's burly carcass. I did not wonder at the yearning tenderness felt for her by old Mr. Marett. She seemed just the gentle, patient, sorrow-stricken creature whom a man, with a heart in his bosom, would champion against mightiest odds.

Ingram asked her if she could not swear that he was at home the previous evening from soon after five till nearly ten, when he heard that Headlands had met with an accident just beyond the Chequers.

The girl-woman trembled, but, gathering courage from our presence, said in a low, shaking voice, "that she thought she had heard him go out before eight o'clock, and return in about an hour." The words had scarcely passed her lips when the ruffian sprang towards and struck her with his open hand upon the cheek. The blow was so suddenly given that neither M'Grath nor I was able to intercept it. It was speedily avenged. The furious young Irishman caught Ingram by the throat, and would, I verily believe, have throttled him outright if I had not resolutely interfered.

"*You* are her champion, too, are you?" muttered the brute, as he lay panting on the floor, glaring at M'Grath, with malignant passion. "Never mind, it may be my turn some day, and it *shall* be that deceitful devil's turn this very night."

"I think not," said I. "I am a witness to the brutal assault upon your wife, and the threat you have just uttered. I shall, therefore, take you, as soon as I have searched the cottage, before the nearest magistrate, whose duty it will be to compel you to find sureties to keep the peace towards your unfortunate wife. Mr. M'Grath," I added, "be pleased to see that he does not leave whilst I am upstairs. I shall search there first."

The wife had left the room, and I wished to speak with her privately. I found her rocking the cradle, in which lay a sickly

child, moaning sadly as she did so, and wiping the blood from her wounded face. She scarcely lifted her eyes to look at me, and answered the few questions I put to her with a melancholy shake of the head. The desolation of despair possessed her wholly :—her child was dying !

I went through the ceremony of searching the cottage, and, as I anticipated, without making the slightest discovery tending to fix the crime of fire-raising upon Ingram.

I then took him before the nearest magistrate I could find at home, who, to my surprise and disgust, after *lecturing* the fellow upon his brutality, dismissed him upon receiving a *promise* that he would not maltreat his wife.

“John Ingram,” said I, as we came out of Justice Shallow’s house, “John Ingram, listen to me for a moment. I shall call at your place to-morrow morning, and if I find that you have in the slightest degree broken your promise to the magistrate I will haul you off before one that will deal very differently with you ; mind, therefore, what you are about.” The fellow honoured me with a ferocious look, but said nothing ; and, turning on his heel, left us.

“Mrs. Ingram’s child appears to be dying,” I remarked to M’Grath as we walked towards Lea Farm.

“Yes, the poor thing will soon be in its coffin. A happy release, though horribly brought about. The child has been literally starved to death,” continued the young man, with much emotion. “In plainer terms, its mother has been so stinted in her food that she could not supply her offspring with sufficient nourishment. I wish to God you had not prevented me from strangling the scoundrel !” he added, with an explosion of rage.

“Surely Mrs. Ingram has friends who would not suffer her to be subjected to such cruelty as that ?”

“She durst not make her sufferings known to them. The husband has a hundred times threatened to murder her if she did. It was only lately, and partly by accident, that a—a friend of hers came to a knowledge of the afflicting case, and that friend has had the greatest difficulty in inducing her to accept nourishing food conveyed to the cottage secretly. Only in the hope of saving the child could her consent be obtained. Her

own health, too, is fast giving way; and if a remedy be not speedily found, many weeks will not have passed before she will have left us for ever. Still there is hope for her," he added in a brisker tone. "For the child relief came too late; but Helen may have yet, I trust, many happy years to live if she can only be rescued from the brutal gripe of her husband. I could have throttled him with ease to-day," continued M'Grath. "My fingers, as they compressed the scoundrel's throat, felt as if turning to steel. And we may not, perhaps, be able, after all, to convict him of arson," he added, with ferocious bitterness.

"It was, then, to convey nourishing food to the half-famished mother and dying child that you secretly visited the cottage this morning. Do not be alarmed; I alone am cognizant of that visit, and now that I understand, honour you for it."

"Mr. Waters," said M'Grath, in a voice of trembling, eager entreaty, "you must keep the secret inviolate. I have myself sworn never to divulge it. Should it come to Ingram's ears he would murder her; at least, she believes he would, which is almost as terrible. He has cowed her into the most abject submission. God, if I but had my hand upon his throat now!"

"Restrain yourself, young man. I comprehend and respect your emotion, but it is necessary to act prudently in this matter. A damaged reputation requires delicate handling. I have, however, faith in Mrs. Ingram's truth."

"Helen is true as infancy; aye, and as pure in heart and mind as the haughtiest she who can boast that she has never been the victim of a villain."

"Meaning, by villain, Mr. Edward Marett."

"Yes; tell *him*, if you will, that I say so. I shall live to thrust 'villain' down his throat as deep as to the lungs. Helen was betrayed by the vilest arts. Her childlike truthfulness rendered her unsuspecting of the guile of others. His letters, filled with fervent vows of fidelity, promises of marriage—false, it proved, as dicers' oaths—Mr. Edward Marett got back, when the crisis came, by the meanest subterfuge—the paltriest trick. Mr. Marett knows all about it; I have taken care of that."

"So I judged. But pray how was it that Edward Marett could terrify or induce such a girl as Helen Champfort to marry John Ingram?"

"By representing to her that his father, her beloved benefactor, was involved in pecuniary difficulties, would ere long be cast into prison, become a pauper for life, if he, Edward Marett, should be hindered from saving him by sacrificing himself in marriage to the rich Miss Stokes. You can hardly, Mr. Waters, conceive, nor could I till lately have imagined, the depth of deceit and cunning that was brought to bear upon the unfortunate Helen Champfort. Never mind; the game is not played out yet."

I remained at Lea Farm several days—five or six, I think—but nothing transpiring which afforded a reasonable hope of detecting the mysterious fire-raiser, I returned to town. The day before I left, Mrs. Ingram's child died.

In less than a week I was again sent for in hot haste, by Mr. Marett. Another fire had occurred—this time in a granary which adjoined the younger Marett's ordinary dwelling-place. There was ample time and opportunity for the house inmates to escape, and, in fact, the flames were subdued before the dwelling itself had sustained any considerable damage.

A frightful tragedy had, nevertheless, been imminent. Two young lads, that had been taken on to work but a day or two previously, had had "shake-downs" prepared for them on the top floor of the granary, there being no sleeping accommodation for them in the house. The very existence of these boys seems to have been forgotten for some time after the fire broke out. In fact, that they slept in the granary was known only to one or two persons. At length, however, a cry was raised that the two boys would be burnt to death, no hope of saving them being entertained, as the building was blazing like a match. In an instant M'Grath, who had been the most active and zealous of all there in rousing and rescuing the Marett family and servants, rushed forward with a cry of horror; plunged into the fire; fought with it, so to speak; and, as if by miracle, succeeded in getting the terrified lads out on the tiled roof, whence they and he were got down by means of ladders promptly supplied. The boys were quit for the fright; but M'Grath himself was terribly burnt, though not dangerously so. The peril and horror of the thing had, however, so affected him that brain fever was for some time apprehended. Active medical treatment



had fortunately subdued those symptoms, and when I arrived at Lea Farm, though he was still weak and nervous, and confined to his bed, no fear was entertained of his speedy recovery.

The foregoing particulars I had from Mr. Marett, who expressed in glowing terms his admiration of M'Grath's heroic courage. That topic exhausted, he explained with a kind of exultation, as he took a crumpled letter from his pocket-book and handed it to me—

“Read that scrawl, Mr. Waters, and tell me what you think of it.”

The “scrawl” ran thus:—

“Mr. Edward Marett,—I'se not dun with yer yet by long chalkes; and minde iff I doan't pay yer yet fer old and neu moor as ever. Vengens his mine—Lucifer Match.”

“That was received by post,” said Mr. Marett, “the day before this last fire. The pothooks are John Ingram's; there's no mistake about that.”

“The pothooks are John Ingram's!” The recollection of that phrase having been applied by Ingram himself to his own writing flashed instantly upon me with the attendant circumstances—M'Grath's eagerness to possess himself of the little book, and the mention by Ingram of how he had been “worried” by M'Grath to write out his waggon account.

“The pothooks John Ingram's! Who can prove that?” I asked.

“This slight scrap of writing,” said Mr. Marett, producing and opening the identical red memorandum-book that I had seen at Ingram's cottage. “Just look at this little account made out by Ingram himself, and compare it with the letter.”

“The two writings closely resemble each other—no question of that.”

“More than this,” continued Mr. Marett, with a kindling triumph which, in a man of his kindly nature, surprised me not a little; “more than this, a discovery has been made this very morning which puts an end to any doubt upon the subject. The letter is, you see, written upon a half-sheet of paper, the torn edge of which is ragged. Well, the corresponding half-sheet,

the edge of which exactly fits this one, was found a couple of hours ago in the secret drawer of a bureau at Ingram's cottage. Proof, that, strong as holy writ."

"The man must have been crazy to write such a letter, knowing, as he must have done, that you—that Mr. M'Grath, I should say—would be sure to recognise his writing."

"Yes, crazed with drink and rage. He has been remanded for a week by the magistrates, and it is very desirable to have the case complete when he is brought up again. I look to you for that. Helen," added Mr. Marett, in a softened voice, "Helen is at my house, under the care of Mrs. Jennings. Poor girl! she is but the shadow—wreck of her former self."

The evidence of a number of minor circumstances, though of not much importance in themselves, would, I felt, viewed in connection with the threatening letter, fully suffice to convict Ingram; and if convicted there was no doubt that he would be hanged, as he would be held to have fired a place in connection with a dwelling-house, thereby placing human lives in peril. This was a frightful consideration, forasmuch that I had no doubt whatever that he was innocent of the crime laid to his charge.

But how was I to act? That was the question, and I was mentally debating it for the twentieth time when, entering the sitting-room at Lea Farm, I found Dennis M'Grath there. He looked pale, and his eyes avoided mine as much as possible. He was cheerful nevertheless, and seemed to have quite recovered from his burns and the nervous shock he had sustained at the fire.

I remarked that I thought my presence was no longer required there, but that I should run down to Romford on the day after the morrow, when Ingram would be again brought before the bench, and no doubt fully committed for trial.

"You have no doubt that he will be fully committed?" said M'Grath eagerly.

"None whatever."

"And if convicted he will, of course, be transported?"

"If convicted he will be hanged."

"Hanged! Good God! Surely you don't mean that?"

"Indeed I do. He will be hanged if he had a hundred necks. Simple arson, if I may use the term, is usually punished by transportation; but arson which jeopardises human life, by death invariably. You are still weak, unwell, Mr. M'Grath. Shall I hand you anything?"

"Yes, a glass of brandy."

His face was white as stone, and he was shaking in every limb. I had judged him aright. Goaded by the master-passions of love, jealousy, and hate, he could resolve to ruin Helen's betrayer, and transport her brutal husband; but there is a sacredness in human life which gives pause to all but the utterly depraved and hardened.

The brandy appeared to steady his nerves, and he presently left the room. Mr. Marett was himself shocked to hear that Ingram, who, felon as he believed him to be, had once saved his life, would, upon conviction, be hanged.

I left for London, and, as agreed upon, returned to Lea Farm early in the morning of the day Ingram was to be brought up for committal. I was anxious to know how the knowledge that Ingram would be hanged, if found guilty, had worked during my brief absence, and was not long kept in doubt.

Mr. Marett, who was extremely agitated, abruptly informed me that Dennis M'Grath had sailed for America. "He intimated that he was sure you had surmised the truth of this wretched, dreadful business. Is that so?"

"Yes, if the truth be that M'Grath fired your son's ricks in order to ruin him for his betrayal of Helen Champfort, and plotted to transport Ingram for marrying and ill-using her."

"Aye; yet who but a practised detective could have supposed such a thing? Edward, it is true, had his suspicions; and it was to dispel them that M'Grath pretended to smell the smoke of the two ricks, as you remember. He could set a fire, it seems, to burst into flame four or five hours afterwards. Merciful God, what cunning—what depravity! I am utterly amazed at the wickedness of men. We must not, however, forget that M'Grath had received strong provocation—we *must* admit that

—strong, almost irresistible provocation to one of such a fiery temperament. And now, what is to be done? Ingram will, of course, be liberated, and Helen, unfortunate girl, replaced under his savage control.”

“I think that may be effectually prevented. I will obtain a private interview with Ingram this morning; tell him, in confidence, that you are unwilling to send a man to the gallows who once saved your life; and that if he will agree to leave the country for ever directly he is liberated, after subscribing a legal deed of separation from his wife, neither you nor your son will appear against him; but that, should he ever return to England the prosecution would be immediately revived against him. Such a proposition, especially if I may promise a sum of money that will leave a few pounds in his pocket when he lands in America, will, I have no doubt, be joyfully acceded to.

Mr. Marett instantly agreed, and the business was quietly arranged as I proposed. Mr. Marett soon afterwards left Essex for Yorkshire, taking with him Helen, who was slowly recovering her health and spirits, and old Mrs. Jennings. I did not much pity Edward Marett, heavy as his losses had been. He fully deserved all that had befallen him, his shrewish wife inclusive.

Full five years had passed away, and I was in Yorkshire, enjoying, with my wife, a brief holiday, when my mother asked, *à propos* of something or other, how it was that I had made no inquiry about Mr. Marett. “He often speaks of you, but perhaps you know all about it,” she added.

“All about what?”

“Why, that Mr. M'Grath, who *it was supposed*—you understand—set fire to the younger Marett's stacks, sailed not for America, but Australia, and prospered there wonderfully. He was concerned, I will not say in the discovery, but in the working of the Burra-burra copper mine. In short, he became so rich that to reimburse Edward Marett's losses was nothing to him. That done, he visited England, came to Yorkshire, and—what do you think? Guess!”

“I shall make a capital guess if it was known, when he came into Yorkshire, that John Ingram was dead.”

"Oh yes! he died of drink within about six months of his arrival at New York."

"That being so, Dennis M'Grath pressed Helen Champfort, as I cannot help calling her, to be his wife. She consented; and the green curtain rings down upon a happy catastrophe, just as it does in plays."

"Right; and a happier pair, let me add, never joined hands. May their happiness increase and multiply, say I!"

"And so say all of us. Amen."

THE END.

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